



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

### **Usage guidelines**

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

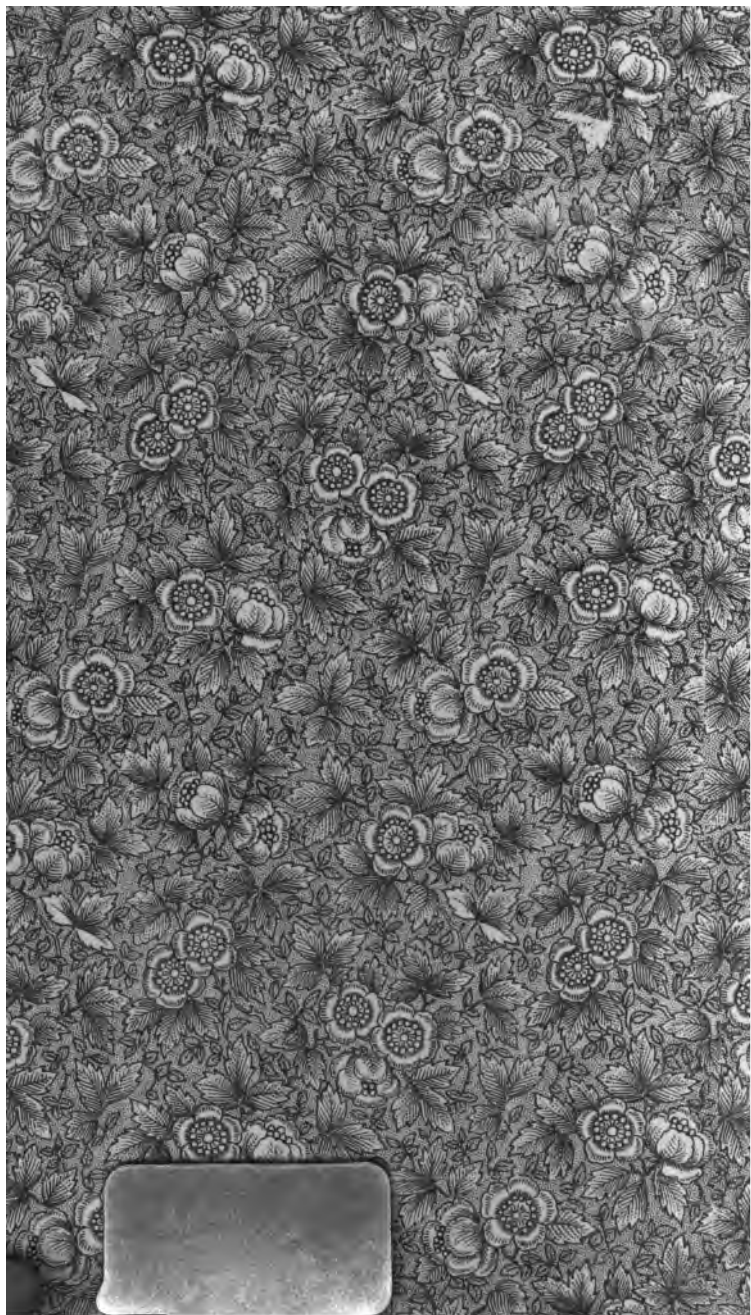
### **About Google Book Search**

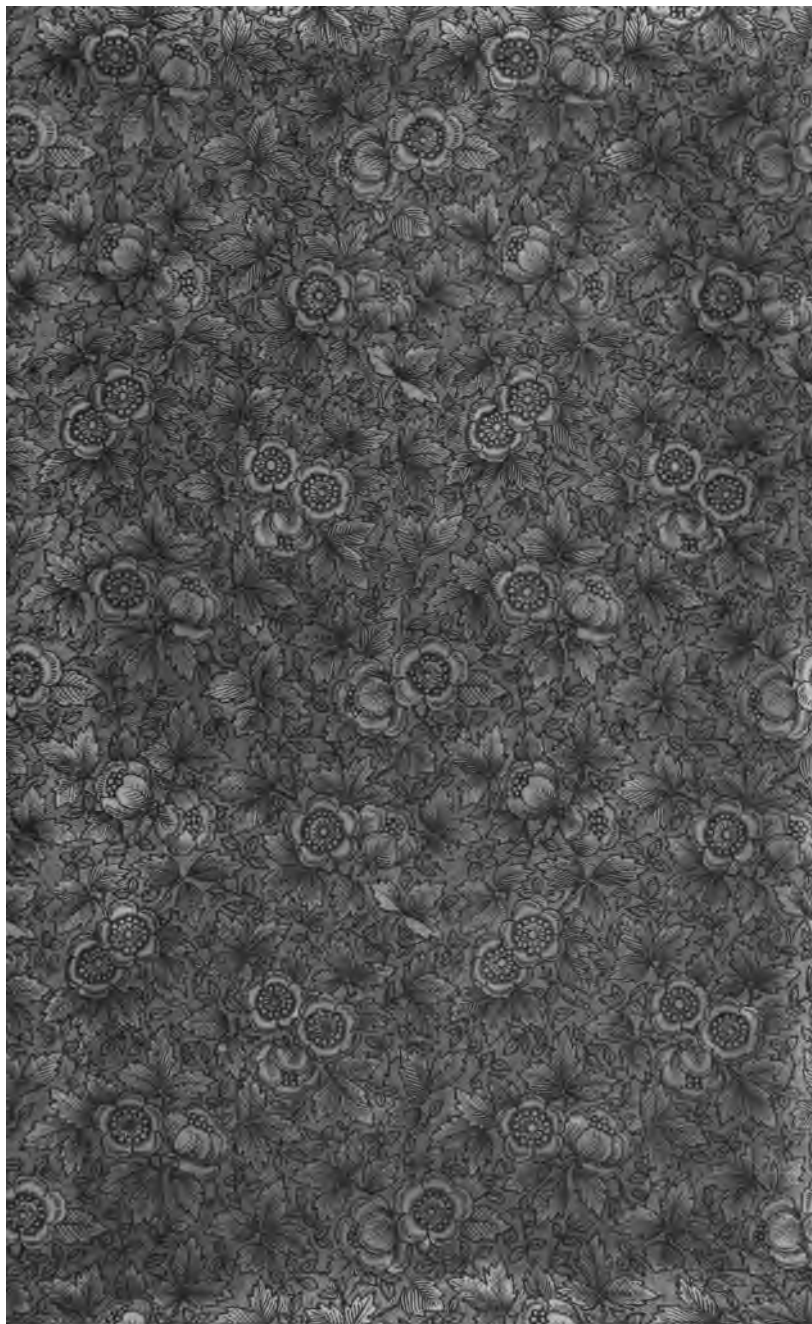
Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

A FEARLESS LIFE

BY THE AUTHOR OF

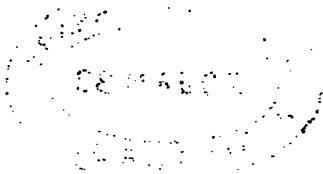
"THROUGH THE STORM"







600064400K



# A FEARLESS LIFE.

BY

CHARLES QUENTIN,

AUTHOR OF "THROUGH THE STORM," ETC.

*IN THREE VOLUMES.*

VOL. III.



LONDON:  
RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,  
NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

1882.

*(All rights reserved.)*

251 k. 287.

PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, LIMITED, LONDON AND BECCLES.

## CONTENTS OF VOL. III.

---

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. FAIBLESSE VAUT VICE ... ..	1
II. CATHERINE TRIUMPHS ... ..	24
III. RUINED AT ROOT ... ..	39
IV. THE WATCHERS IN THE STORM ... ..	53
V. LOVES AND LURES ... ..	74
VI. DYING WORDS ... ..	89
VII. REMORSE AKIN TO MADNESS ... ..	101
VIII. WHO LOSES AND WHO WINS? ... ..	117
IX. A TRAGIC NIGHT ... ..	129
X. PEACE, TO THE QUIET DEAD ... ..	157
XI. UNDER ARREST ... ..	165
XII. THE ACCUSING VOICE ... ..	188
XIII. HAWORTH'S LAST SERVICE ... ..	207
XIV. WHO DARES GREATLY, DOES GREATLY	219
XV. THE WORLD AGAINST HER HEART ... ..	236
XVI. THE TRUTH IS KNOWN ... ..	245
XVII. THE END CROWNS ALL ... ..	251





# A FEARLESS LIFE.

---

## CHAPTER I.

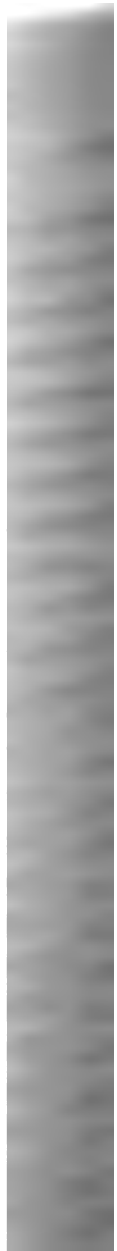
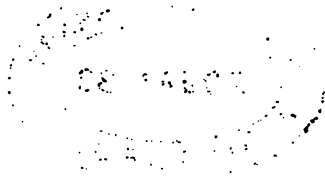
### FAIBLESSE VAUT VICE.

SOME months passed. The autumn was cold this year on the north coast of Cornwall.

Evelyn Holt was a frail girl, and her mind had no strength to lend to her body. Allan's desertion of her she at first took haughtily; the loss was his. He had insulted her by rough words; she would show him she could cast off the memory of his love; she would show him that there were others who prized her. But as time went on, Evelyn found herself unable to carry out her scheme, and this irritated her. She grew more sickly, more languid. She did not fully believe that this estrangement would continue; she felt that Allan



600064400K



would return to his allegiance, and ask to be forgiven; and she rehearsed little imaginary scenes with him, in which he pleaded brokenheartedly for her love once more, and she with dignity repulsed him, then in pity listened, and finally told him, tenderly and sorrowfully, that he had come too late, and that the love he had spurned had been won by the faithfulness of another.

Alas! *the other* failed to fulfil his part. Not long after Evelyn's rupture with Allan, Armfield went to London, and remained there for some time. While there, being much absorbed by difficulties of a pecuniary and also of an amatory nature, not one thought of Armfield's flitted to Evelyn Holt; but just as he was leaving town it occurred to him to buy her some fashionable music. He felt sure that, armed with this propitiatory gift, Evelyn would receive him with open arms; indeed, without it he felt confident of an affectionate reception. He reflected that by keeping away from Evelyn for a little while, after the row with that fool Moore, he had made it pretty clear that he was not going to be the scapegoat; and now he felt he might call and see

her, and amuse himself without being bothered. He hated to be worried by women; he had quite enough of that sort of thing in London, without the nuisance of a romantic, country girl hanging round his neck, and imagining he meant to marry her.

Evelyn was cruelly disappointed when Trevor did not rush to console her after Allan's desertion. She was hurt at Armfield's taking no notice of her letter, still more hurt at his going to London without seeing her; but, after a while, she concluded that it was extreme delicacy and consideration for her which made him absent himself for a time, and so Evelyn consoled herself with French novels, and awaited his return with tolerable composure. She missed Allan's visits and letters—much of the excitement and romance of life seemed gone—but she felt sure he would return, and that she should see him again.

Evelyn was shocked when her father told her one evening that Allan Moore had quarrelled with his father, and had gone to work as a common labourer in the mines. Evelyn started when she heard this, and she felt a momentary self-reproach.

"It cannot really be true, papa," she said, with an expression of horror.

"Perfectly true," he answered, "for I saw him myself in the miner's dress. I had heard a report of it long ago. I must say," he added, "I am heartily glad that you have nothing to say to him now. He is a ne'er-do-weel, and cannot have much gentleman-like feeling, or he would never choose such a low life at the very door, I may say, of the girl he professed to love."

"I can't imagine how Allan can bear to associate with such people," Evelyn said with a shudder; "but I think the poor fellow must be very unhappy to have done it."

Here the corners of Evelyn's lips drooped, and she dropped a gentle tear.

"Even if he were unhappy," said Dr. Holt, "he could bear his disappointment like a man, and not behave like a mountebank. I've no patience with that sort of thing. I don't like the vicar; he is a canting sort of man, never will join any sensible scheme for the good of the poor, but dabbles in charity, and tries to make himself popular with women; but a father is a father, and Allan Moore

ought to know better than to try and annoy him in this way. I am right glad," Dr. Holt continued, drawing nearer to his daughter, and taking her hand, "that my pretty Evelyn is free. It would break my heart if she were to be married to an uncertain, bad-tempered man. You are too frail, child, too delicate for rough ways; you must have the best and tenderest of husbands, and you can wait a bit. You need not be in such a hurry to leave your old pater."

Evelyn liked to be petted; she thought it pretty and graceful to lie on the sofa and have her hand stroked by her father. Listening to him, she almost agreed that Allan Moore was not good enough for her; but she was touched by his having desperately plunged into the bowels of the earth to escape from the memory of her lost love. She thought she might watch for him one day, and condescendingly say a kind word to him. Now that she was in this position it would be easy for her to speak first. She closed her eyes, and began to dream of the romance of her life.

Her father sat beside her. He would have liked to smoke, but long ago he had learnt that

Evelyn objected to the smell of tobacco, so he always waited for his nightly pipe till she had gone to bed. The boys were in another room. They did not appreciate the languid grace of Evelyn ; and occasional uproarious outbursts, which penetrated to the drawing-room, showed that their evening was not so poetically spent as hers.

Evelyn dreamed on. Could she prevent men loving her? Impossible. In the wide field of romantic literature in which Evelyn roamed, the heroine with whom she most sympathized was one who was always surrounded with lovers—a heroine whose heart bled for them all, who was all feeling, who loved passionately the poorest of her lovers, but outraged her feelings by marrying the richest, from a sense of duty ; who, after marriage, was again surrounded by a circle of lovers for whom her heart again bled, but whom she kept hovering between hope and despair at a virtuous distance, as became a dignified matron.

Evelyn still felt secure of both Armfield and Moore, in spite of all that had happened, and reflecting this evening, with her eyes closed



and a slight smile on her lips, she felt she was not altogether sorry at the turn events had taken. It was, perhaps, true what her father had said—Allan was not good enough for her. If he had prized her he would have gone into the Church, and have become a bishop. She had heard that Trevor had returned to Armfield Towers. To-morrow, he would probably come to see her ; he would ask forgiveness for not replying to her note, and would explain everything. Some day she would watch for Allan, and speak to him. He would, of course, be touched by her thinking of him when he was a common workman. She would tell him she was sure he felt sorry for his hasty words, and that he was entirely mistaken in supposing that she had deceived him in any way. (So entirely bereft was Evelyn's mind of any understanding of the signification of honour that she felt this statement would be perfectly truthful.) He had no right now to control her actions, and he would be flattered that she should condescend, of her own free will, to explain. She did not wish to marry Trevor for some time. She saw coming years bringing more admirers. She did not wish to

destroy any one's peace, but how could she avoid it? Pretty women were always loved.

Evelyn, after the first moment of anger, had not thought much more of Nora. She did not believe in Nora's power to rob her of Allan's love, therefore her resentment was not active. She contented herself with turning her head away when Nora passed, or lifting it in a manner significant of her contempt.

There was a keen spirit of retaliation in Evelyn, but it was not roused yet, because she had not realized that Nora's accusation had made any essential change in her life.

Dr. Holt was watching his daughter as she lay there, pursuing her pleasing train of thought. He knew how frail she was, and that in her delicate body was a fixed tendency to consumption, which had been inherited from her mother. He had brought her to Cairn Cove in the warm summer days, hoping that the sea air might brace her, and so satisfactory had been the result that he had kept her here through the winter; but this year he could see that her delicacy had increased, and now the cold winds would soon come, and he feared for her. He was thinking this even-

ing that, her engagement being luckily at an end, he must try to persuade her to go with her aunt to Cannes.

Dr. Holt yielded to Evelyn in all things. He failed to see, medical man though he was, that the physical and moral atmosphere in which she lived was unhealthy. Her mind needed the tonic of a wise authority, her body needed the tonic of bright out-door life and muscular exertion. Instead of this, being indulged in her whims, her whims grew, and living a perfectly supine life, her bodily weakness increased.

We can't sweep away such pitiful creatures. They live on, they hurt, they poison wholesome lives; they have a false beauty which they believe true, and others believe true; and always fatally attached to them is some far finer and nobler life, which sacrifices itself, and gives all its highest aims, its strongest desires, to nurture mean hopes and selfish indulgence. Is the best to be the slave of the worst always?

On Sunday mornings, Dr. Holt always took the boys to church; it was the one bit of discipline he insisted on. Evelyn found the service too long, and the church too cold.

It was on Sunday morning that the squire had been wont to call, and as he had returned to Armfield Towers, it was possible he might call this morning ; so Evelyn, with more than her usual care, adorned herself, and awaited his arrival. A flippant remark from one of the boys on her "get-up," as he called it, irritated her, and spoiled the expression of her face for some minutes ; but when they had all gone to church, and the house was quiet, she felt more at ease. She looked at herself in the drawing-room mirror for some time, and smiled ; she was well pleased. Delicacy gave to her face a refinement which she lacked mentally. She was very pretty ; 'most soft and transparent was her skin, her eyes large and lustrous, her neck so fair and round that it invited a caress. She felt conscious of her beauty, and this consciousness gave her power. She went back to her sofa contented and confident. She would not be too eager when Trevor came in, nor show that she had expected him sooner. What did it matter to her whether he came or not ? She was a beautiful girl, and need not be dependent on Trevor Armfield for admiration or love.

While Evelyn thought these things, Armfield came.

“I heard you were away,” she said carelessly. “When did you come back?”

“About three days ago,” Armfield answered; “but I’ve been very busy till to-day. I ought to have answered your little note before I left. Are you vexed with me?”

He drew his chair near her.

“Vexed? No. Did it require an answer?”

“You see,” he said, “I did not know what to say. I was in a rage that a low hound like Moore should be rough and make a fool of himself from stupid jealousy, and yet I could not say I was sorry that your engagement was broken off—could I?”

“I don’t know,” she said, looking down and playing with the lace round her wrists.

Her eyelids were a beautiful shape, her eyelashes were long and dark, the slight flush on her cheek and timidity of manner were fascinating to Armfield. He came nearer to her. He began to think that, after all, this silly, romantic girl was very attractive.

“You don’t know?” he said. “Oh yes, you do; but I’ll not tease you by talking of it.”

"It does not tease me," she said gently. "You have always been so nice and kind to me I like to tell you all that happens. That is the reason I wrote to you. Besides," she added, with dignity, "it was right to tell you all about it, as your name was mentioned. *You* know that I was not deceitful, that I told you quite plainly of my engagement."

"Of course you did. You behaved uncommonly well; and that fellow Moore is a jealous idiot, and deserves to lose you."

"You don't think me deceitful?" she asked appealingly, lifting her eyes suddenly, and looking at Trevor.

Her large eyes had a peculiar way of opening, and looking as if she were revealing her very soul.

"I'm not such a fool. We liked being together. Why should not we? And if I kissed you once or twice—well, I'm not a saint, and I don't believe in them. Do you suppose Moore has not kissed a dozen women in Rome, without half the temptation?"

"I think not," Evelyn said stiffly. "Of course, as a rule, it would be wrong; but you were very kind and sympathizing when I was

sad, and I did not think about it, and allowed you to kiss me just as I would allow any dear friend."

Armfield could not remember what he had sympathized about, and certainly thought his kisses somewhat warmer than those of "any dear friend," but he let this pass with a slight smile. But his temper was a little ruffled when she added—

"I hope, if you don't mind, you will come and see me just as usual, so as not to give cause for stupid gossip by ceasing your visits. I suppose I ought to feel flattered that the world of Cairn Cove thinks every one must be in love with me; but I feel a little indignant that I should be thought to be in love with every one."

"Then your heart is still faithful to Moore?" he said quickly.

"I did not say so. I was always fond of Allan, and he—he was very, very much in love with me; and I was over-persuaded, and allowed myself to be engaged. It was stupid, for I'm sure I don't want to marry and become an old matron. I am so young."

She tossed her head back with a laugh.

“Not even if you were very, very much in love?”

“I can’t tell till I’m in that desperate state.”

“You can’t imagine, you can’t guess what you would do?”

Armfield said this with an expression of devotion in his eyes, which was so customary with him when in the society of women, that it had become somewhat worn by constant use.

“Oh, not the least.”

She looked at him with a laugh, then withdrew her glance and blushed. She felt quite happy. This was a delightful day.

“What a lucky man he will be, Evelyn, who makes you care for him above all the world.”

She discovered tremulous tones in Armfield’s voice. She felt sure he must love her.

“Will he?” she asked timidly. “Allan would not say so; he thinks me cruel, but I did not mean to hurt him. Do you know—did you hear that he has gone to work as a common labourer in the mines? I was so shocked.”

Armfield laughed.

“Don’t bother your pretty head about him. Why should he be such a fool? I dare say



it is the kind of society he prefers. I am sure the vicar is not a very aristocratic specimen of humanity."

The first cousin of an earl, the nephew of a viscount, and the owner of Armfield Towers talking thus, made Evelyn recognize that perhaps, after all, no well-born gentleman would associate with the working-classes, and that, refined as Allan appeared, this step that he had taken was the result of plebeian descent.

"Surely," she said, in feeble protest, "education refines a man—makes him a gentleman?"

"By Jove, it doesn't! I know fellows—university men—the greatest boors that ever stepped! Believe me, a man owes something to his ancestry."

He drew himself up proudly, as if illustrating his statement in his own person.

"Poor Allan was always very gentlemanly, except, perhaps, in my last interview with him. He forgot himself a little then, and said things which, I am sure, he is sorry for now. But I forgive him," she added complacently, "for the poor fellow was so wild about me."

"Why do you make men break their hearts about you, Evelyn?"

“I can't help it,” she answered, with child-like simplicity.

“No, you are so pretty, so soft, so tender, and so unlike other women.”

He stroked her hand as he spoke.

Evelyn thought Trevor was hovering on the brink of a declaration. She wished him to speak decidedly; it would make everything so much more comfortable. Perhaps he required encouragement, but she hesitated about giving it. She liked to be mistress of the position, and if in any way she admitted that she loved him, he might feel that she was in his power—to take or leave, as he liked. This was her instinct, the wary instinct of inferior organizations. She withdrew her hand partially, not entirely, from his touch.

“Ah, you all say that sort of thing,” she replied, as if well versed in such matters; “but you are always ready to condemn women if they do anything which hurts your vanity; ready to be unkind and cruel, and you forget all about the softness and tenderness.”

She got up, as she spoke, and walked to the window.

Armfield observed her with more than his

usual attention. This country girl was certainly lovely—a girl whom a man would like to make a slave; a girl, once conquered, who would cling to you and do your bidding like a dog; a girl, whom a man of sense would weary of before long, but who, for the time, would be all the more fascinating.

“What is the special attraction at the window?” he asked. “Won’t you sit down again? It is a pleasure to be near you.”

She came back.

“I often walk about the room when I am thinking earnestly about things.”

“Now that you are free, and my visits are not likely to get you into trouble, you must let me come and see you often.”

“Yes; it is so pleasant to have a friend to whom I can tell all my little troubles, and who does not imagine all sorts of ridiculous things.”

Evelyn talked airily, as if Armfield were an old woman, and he did not quite like it.

“I am not sure that I shall not want to be something more than a mere friend.”

“Well, not an ordinary friend, of course, whom one talks and laughs with and forgets,

but a dear friend, whom one relies on, and tells all one's little secrets to. Will that satisfy you ?”

“ Yes, perhaps ; if I am to be a very, very dear friend.”

He put his arm round her waist, drew her towards him, and kissed her cheek.

“ Of course,” he continued, “ I could not aspire to be anything more ; and whenever some one comes, whom you really love, I'll not make a row, like that fool Moore, but will let you be happy.”

As he ended, he kissed her again, a little more boldly and passionately.

She felt angry at this very disinterested relinquishing of her. Poor Evelyn ! her little romantic schemes were not satisfactory in accomplishment ; but she disguised her discomfort, and said, with a smile—

“ Very well, we shall be great allies, and I'll take this—this caress as sealing the agreement. But friends need only shake hands ; that will do for the future. You know, when that *some one* you allude to comes, he might be angry.”

“ What a fool he'd be,” Armfield said

sulkily, "and damned selfish, too. Why should I not kiss you, if I'm fond of you? How can a man expect that a beautiful girl like you can think there is but one man in the world? Pshaw!"

"Don't be unjust," she said, holding up her forefinger playfully. "Think if it were your case, how you would like the girl you had chosen, to be very affectionate with other men!"

She looked at him triumphantly, as if she had driven him into a corner, from which there was no escape.

"Don't taunt me with this *some one*; I can't stand it. Treat me as your brother, or friend, or any one you like; but don't look so bewitching, and seem so indifferent to me, or I'll think you a heartless flirt."

"Oh no; I'm not a flirt!" she exclaimed, in a tone of horror.

"Are you not? I'm not quite sure. I begin to think it is rather dangerous for me to come and see you. Of course, it does not matter for you; you don't care."

It was half a question, and he looked at her in such a way that it became quite a question:

What could she say? She laughed nervously, and was silent. Then, feeling that his eyes were still fixed on her, she said, hesitatingly—

“I don’t know—perhaps. A woman must disguise her feelings—must she not?”

He was holding her hand and looking at her.

“Evelyn,” he began.

His voice was low. A thrill of hope passed through Evelyn. Uncertainty was about to end. Again she would be the object of adoration and devotion, her life would be full of excitement and sweetness. There would be the daily visits of her lover, his jealousies of other men, and the delightful sensation of holding him in bondage.

“Evelyn,” he repeated, and then was silent for a minute. Suddenly he rose to his feet. “You must not drive a man crazy. I might say things you would not like. This is not much like being a brother or friend—is it?”

Evelyn looked most utterly astonished. Had he really misunderstood her? Was she sending him away?

“No,” she said quickly; “but I did not mean; I—if you care——” she stammered.

“I care a great deal too much,” he interrupted, “and you don’t; and even if you did, what’s the good? I know I’m a selfish brute; but you are such a pretty child, I won’t pain you or worry you, I’m damned if I do.” He put his arms round her waist as he spoke. “And I’ll go away now, and come some other day, perhaps.”

As he ended, he kissed her several times, roughly, passionately, as she had never been kissed, and rushed away before she could speak.

Evelyn heard the hall door shut after him, heard him whistle to his dog. She was too dazed to move or think. Her heart throbbed triumphantly. How wild Trevor was about her! What power she had over him! Evidently he thought there was no hope for him. She must be kinder next time. How different he was from Allan! Allan’s love seemed tame and cold compared with Trevor’s. What strange things were always happening to her! She had not encouraged Trevor, and yet he was quite madly in love with her.

Evelyn composed herself in her old place on the sofa, and took up a book, but her face was

flushed and her eyes eager when her father came in. He noticed the change at once, and thought her feverish and ill. He sat down beside her, and told her his scheme of sending her to the south with her aunt. Evelyn laughed at the proposal, and said she was quite well. This made Dr. Holt all the more anxious about it, and he urged the change, till Evelyn grew impatient.

“Why should you hunt me away?” she said. “Don’t you care to have me with you? This beautiful sea air makes me strong, and I’m very well here, and like to be here. If I go away I shall mope and get ill, and perhaps die. If you could come too, it would be different.”

“I could go and see you at Christmas, and stay a little. I might get Dr. Seymour to take my work for a fortnight.”

“Well,” she said, catching eagerly at this, “let me stay here till then, and, if you think it necessary, you can take me yourself.”

“How will you bear the cold till Christmas?” said Dr. Holt dolefully; but he offered no further resistance. He knew it was useless. He had accustomed Evelyn, since she was a



child, to having her own way in all things, and, though this delay might kill her, he knew that, if he compelled her to go against her will, the result might be the same. Thus he sorrowfully relinquished the subject for the present.

## CHAPTER II.

### CATHERINE TRIUMPHS.

ALL through the week that followed, Evelyn Holt watched for Armfield's coming. Over and over again she recalled the scene on Sunday, repeating his words to herself and finding always some fresh possibility in them. She grew uneasy as the close of the week came and Armfield had not called. She went out to walk now, contrary to her usual habit, and gathered all possible information about her new lover. She heard he had been at a county ball, also at an evening party given by Catherine Severne, to which she, Evelyn, had not been invited. She quickly concluded that Nora had prevented her being invited, and she chronicled this little fact for future consideration. She did not want to think about Nora now, she was entirely absorbed by the thought

of Trevor Armfield. The range of Evelyn's mind was limited—one subject engrossed her entirely. She began to feel indignant at Armfield's neglect of her, and was determined to see him ; but her walks were unlucky, and for more than a week she did not meet him. They were unlucky walks in another way, for the winds were raw and cold, and as Evelyn lacked energy to walk briskly she was often chilled. Her cough grew worse, and Dr. Holt forbade her to go out. Of course he was not obeyed. But the time of Evelyn's wanderings was changed to a later hour, when she knew her father was seeing patients at a distance ; and to the cold of sharp winds was now added the chill of evening. Her life seemed to Evelyn to lack lustre since neither Allan nor Trevor came, it grew grey and uninteresting. She could not bear it like this. She must change it. Such an existence might be suitable to a plain, awkward girl, but for her it was absurd. She grew tired of the monotonous days. One evening, returning home a little later than usual, Evelyn almost decided to go to the south with her aunt and abandon her Cornish lovers. She felt sure

that once she had gone their hearts would be filled with remorse, but a remorse which she could not witness seemed an unsatisfactory equivalent for a love which she wished to enjoy.

Evelyn was dawdling along the road. She was cold, but was too apathetic to quicken her steps. She heard some one walking behind her and whistling as he walked; at the same moment a staghound bounded up to her. She turned to greet Trevor Armfield, her face quite brightened. He stopped whistling and came up with her.

“Ah, Miss Holt,” he said cheerily, “I am surprised. How come you to be out so late? I thought you were such a delicate creature that you must not leave your fireside at this hour.”

His tone was careless, as of a man content and occupied, to whom this meeting was of no importance. Evelyn had struggled for this meeting, but she felt at once it was a disappointment. Should she tell him she had watched for him? Should she acknowledge she was lonely, that she missed his visits.

Evelyn was a woman who, if her ends were

gained, would feel no shame of the means used, but if she failed of her purpose would be smitten with a morbid remorse. She had not courage nor heart enough to abandon herself to any course, but would pitifully shiver through life, shielding herself as best she could.

"I often come out to walk lately," she answered, "it is dull at home."

"Dull! With all those noisy brothers? They'd keep any house alive."

"They are not companions to me."

"Too rough and unsentimental? By the way, there is a report that you are going abroad—is it true?"

"Papa wishes me to go, but I do not like to leave Cairn Cove. I have had," she added, dropping her voice and looking down, "happy days here, and though it is not probable I shall have happy days again, yet I like to stay here."

Surely she had said enough. If Trevor cared, if he were not utterly heartless, he would speak now.

"Oh, there are lots of happy days in store for you," he said cheerfully. "Such a pretty girl as you are can't fail to have good luck in

life. You must not waste your time thinking of Allan Moore. Why, you have only to beckon him back, and he'll be at your feet to-morrow. He can't be such an idiot as to keep up his resentment because of our friendliness, or our flirtation, or whatever he may be pleased to call it. Besides, he must see now that we meant nothing by it."

He ran on quite easily, and Evelyn grew angry. Did he purposely misunderstand her, or had her airy treatment of his courtship that Sunday quite misled him?

"You quite mistake what I mean," she said, with evident annoyance. "I am not thinking of Allan Moore. I don't want to win him back."

"Then there is some one else, and you've kept it a dead secret, in spite of our compact of friendship. Are you not ashamed of yourself?" he said laughingly.

"You know," she said quickly. "Why do you pretend ignorance?"

She waited for his reply, almost holding her breath. She had been rash, but she could not check the words.

"Upon my soul, I don't know. You might as well gratify a fellow's curiosity."

Armfield knew well that Evelyn was trying to lead him to a declaration, and he was not at all in the mood for it. At times he could have enjoyed the pastime of playing at love with her; at times even some sort of substitute for love, such as men of his nature can offer, might show itself in his eyes, in his voice, in his manner—say, in a bright room when Evelyn was beautifully dressed, and he was in an idle, talkative mood—at such times a response to her loving hints was perhaps possible; but here, coming home after a day's shooting, and thinking of his dinner and feeling uncommonly hungry, Evelyn's sentimentality was an intolerable bore to him.

When Evelyn heard Trevor's reply, she could have stamped her foot, screamed, or torn her hair. Any of these demonstrations would have expressed her feelings. However, she only answered rapidly with the quick instinct of self-protection, "I thought every one knew, but as they don't, I will not gratify your curiosity."

The stupidest woman can deceive, has a talent for deception, which a dull masculine

mind cannot attain to. Armfield was surprised, and felt he had made a mistake after all.

They had reached the place where the path to Armfield Towers branched off from the main road, and so Trevor held out his hand—

“I must say good-bye now, as I am expecting a man to dinner, and must not keep him waiting; but some other time, before you go abroad, you must make a clean breast of it, and tell me your secrets, or I shall think you’ve broken your promise of friendship.”

He lifted his hat, whistled to his dog, and was gone before Evelyn could say more than “Good-bye.” She could not keep back the tears now. The wind was cold, her chest pained her, she found it hard to breathe. Why had she come out? Every one was heartless. She had never done any harm to any one, and they all hurt her, and did not care.

When Evelyn reached home, she found Catherine Severne awaiting her. Catherine did not come very often to the doctor’s house, and it surprised Evelyn to find her there. The latter held out her hand, said she was tired from a long walk, and subsided on the sofa.

Catherine’s eyes were unusually brilliant.



This was one of her days of glory and joy. She did not speak for a few minutes, she slowly anticipated the coming pleasure. At last she laughed. Evelyn looked astonished, and said snappishly—

“I am very weak and ill to-day, perhaps you will tell me what you’ve come for. Something seems to amuse you.”

“Yes,” she said quickly, “I’m amused. I might pretend to be good-natured, and say I’ve come to give you the means of proving to Allan Moore that he was mistaken, and that the gossip about you and Mr. Armfield had no foundation. I might pretend to be friendly, and say I’ve come to tell you of my happiness ; but why should I pretend ?”

Evelyn did not reply, she only opened her eyes very wide, and from her nervous condition of body and mind, began to fear some unpleasant tidings.

“Of course, I know all about your interviews with Mr. Armfield,” Catherine said suddenly.

“I noticed them all.”

Evelyn blushed, but could say no word.

Catherine continued, with a smile—

“I always retaliate, if I can, when people

hurt me. It hurts me that you should try to entrap Mr. Armfield. Perhaps you would have felt the same, if some one had tried to entrap Allan Moore. I don't understand people who are weakly forgiving. So I've come to tell you that I am engaged to Mr. Armfield, have been engaged to him for a long time."

Catherine thoroughly enjoyed that moment.

"How could he have dared——" Evelyn stammered.

Catherine laughed.

"Of course you led him on. I don't pretend; why should you? Trevor being engaged to me, and knowing you were engaged to Allan Moore, was too indolent to make love to you without a little help; you helped him and became my rival. Do you think I could ever patiently submit to a rival?"

Catherine laughed again.

"It was not difficult to beat my rival out of the field, was it?" she continued, without giving Evelyn time to speak. "Trevor told me everything, he began to get bored himself; so, to make everything quite plain, I've come to tell you of our engagement. We did not mean to announce it for some time, but perhaps

it's just as well to tell people; it prevents mistakes."

At last Catherine paused, and looked fixedly at Evelyn.

"I think you are unkind and rude and unlady-like," she replied, with the unmanageable, impotent anger of a weak nature. "Mr. Armfield and I were only friends, and if—and if he said I led him on, he said untruths; and this is my father's house, and you have no right to come here to be wicked, and please go away. I do not wish to listen to you."

Then, in a foolish sort of way, Evelyn rose to ring the bell as if to dismiss her visitor.

Catherine laughed.

"I've only told you the truth, and now you can go back to Allan and say you are sorry, if you are a sensible girl. After all, I speak out and say what I think, and make people pay for interfering with me; but I have not done you half the harm that Nora has done you behind your back."

Then Catherine rose and turned towards the door.

"Please do not come to see me again," Evelyn said quickly, seizing her last opportunity

of retort. "Every one seems to find pleasure in hurting a weak, sensitive girl. I am not accustomed to such coarse ways, and shall be glad to go away from amongst you. I hope Mr. Armfield will like that sort of thing."

"Yes, we suit each other admirably," was Catherine's reply.

Evelyn, having by her last speech somewhat regained her mental equilibrium, said no further word; and Catherine, with another laugh, left the room.

The one woman was cleverly vicious, the other a weak fool, and as much evil could be wrought amongst their fellows by the one nature as by the other.

Catherine walked home rejoicing. She had triumphed with Armfield, and got him to consent to the announcement of their engagement. She had swept away one opponent who had annoyed her, but she had other victories to win before she could be content. She reflected that the last words she had spoken to Evelyn would probably dwell in the mind of the latter; and that, weak fool though she was, she would cherish a desire to avenge herself on Nora, and the desire might one day take effect.

Clifford was coming back, Catherine repeated to herself; Clifford was coming back. Now that she was openly engaged to Trevor, now that her bonds were riveted as it were, a stronger, madder passion for Clifford seemed to possess her. Trevor might be her husband one day; Guy must be her lover. It was a perfectly unreasoning, savage passion. Oh, she did not try to disguise it to herself. She did not ask herself if it were noble, maidenly, honourable, anything; she only plotted to win him. The very strength of her love seemed to her a guarantee of its success. By bribery, by cajolery, by traps and lies, Catherine had found out from Jessie Lawless' the signals used by the *Sunlight* to announce its arrival. She had ascertained too that Wreck Cottage was the store-house of the smuggled goods, and that Armfield suspected this, but was not quite certain of it. She resolved to mislead Armfield, so as to gain time with Clifford, and to use all her knowledge to touch Guy's heart; or, failing this, to avenge herself on him for his rejection of her love.

Catherine was dangerous now, in her untamed, cruel excitement, and would not stop at

anything to gain her ends. What could control her? Not religion, not love, not fear. She was simply acting out her nature. Through Clifford she meant to strike Nora. If she won him, it would hurt Nora; if she ruined him, it would hurt Nora. Thus Catherine reflected as she walked home that day, being wrong in her calculations in one essential point—Nora's feeling towards Clifford.

There is often one mistake, which makes the working out of a scheme for good or evil, incomplete.

Dr. Holt, ever watchful of his favourite child, noticed how ill Evelyn looked the evening after her interviews with Armfield and Catherine. Evelyn's impatient, irritable manner, her father attributed to increased bodily ailment, so again he urged the residence in the south during the winter. It was an unfortunate moment to advise it. At first Evelyn peevishly objected, then, as her father persisted, she burst into tears, and asserted that every one wanted her to do everything she hated. Dr. Holt's efforts to soothe her, ended in Evelyn's going into hysterics, and being carried up to bed. She was feverish at night,

and Dr. Holt was with her constantly. This child was very dear to him. He was sad for her, he could not disguise that his heart was troubled; but there was no loving recognition of his anxiety in Evelyn's eyes, no effort at brightness for his sake.

Evelyn lay on the sofa all next day, peevishly complaining, telling herself she was going to die, acting, in imagination, tragic scenes with Allan, when he should be called to her death-bed. In these scenes, somewhere in the background, she pictured Trevor Armfield, standing gloomily, a prey to everlasting remorse. She longed for Allan now; she wanted him to put his arms' round her and fondle her, and tell her she was a most ill-used martyr; she wanted to hear him beg to be forgiven for having pained her. In these days Evelyn grew quite fond of Allan. She began to think that she had really loved him, and him only. She was scornful of Armfield. She resolved when she was well enough to go out that she would see Allan. She would meet him coming from his work in his miner's dress. Poor Allan! After all, she had been foolish perhaps, and though she had meant no harm,

still, with a man like Allan, who was so madly in love with her, it might have been wrong to have run the risk of rousing his jealousy. Perhaps this little separation would be a lesson to him, and in future he would leave her more free, and would not be so absurdly suspicious. He would hear that she had been ill, and such tidings would make him tenderer to her when they met.

Thus Evelyn weaved her little romance, while she daily grew more ill, and only her father knew how ill.

What did it matter about such a life? Verily there was not enough heart in her to keep the feeble body alive, and yet—Thought rushes into endless paths, and is lost in a maze if it pursues the connection there is between all human creatures, and notes the strange and sometimes tragic events which hinge on the extinction of the merest rushlight of life.



### CHAPTER III.

#### RUINED AT ROOT.

It was damp and cold, the day that Evelyn determined to intercept Allan and to try her old power of fascination, but she resolved that the weather should not deter her from carrying out her plan. Her father had gone a long distance into the country to attend an aristocratic patient, who, when in health, called Dr. Holt a fool, and when ill, was abject in flattery of his physician. The boys, taking advantage of their father's absence, had gone off on some mysterious expedition, so Evelyn was absolutely free from the supervision of her family. It was blowing hard, and there was a drizzling rain, which ceased at intervals. It was a day full of false hopes. Now and then the dark clouds, as they were blown away,

allowed a glimpse of blue sky to appear, then again the whole heavens became grey and sad. Evelyn dressed herself with a view to effect, not comfort. She wished the contrast between her dainty attire and Allan's coarse habit of toil to be as marked as possible, and as she contemplated herself in the glass before starting, she was very justly pleased with her appearance. Her maid and confidante, whom by turns she treated with overbearing impatience and affectionate familiarity, had a lover in the mines, and through him Evelyn had learned the hours the workmen left off work, and the path that Allan took from the mine to the studio.

From a little natural nervousness and anxiety, Evelyn was too early on the road, and walked up and down in the drizzling rain for half an hour. She was slightly uneasy lest her plumage should be spoiled, but solaced herself with the thought that Allan must be touched at her having faced the elements for his sake. She compared herself to many heroines of fiction as she waited, to damsels who had given all for love—a sacrifice which Evelyn Holt was never minded to make, save in

imagination. She walked a considerable distance towards the mine while she reflected on her extremely romantic position, and got mentally through a long and most tragic dialogue with Allan, which she could not end satisfactorily, being doubtful as to the most dignified termination—whether to leave Allan a prey to remorse, or sweetly grant him forgiveness.

Suddenly Allan appeared round a corner of the road. Evelyn started, her hands trembled. When she addressed him, should she say Allan or should she say Mr. Moore? He had not seen her yet. He was walking slowly, his eyes on the ground. When they were quite close to one another Allan looked up. Evelyn stopped and held out her hand to him. For a second he was puzzled, then said quietly—

“My hands are excessively dirty, you must excuse my touching yours.”

There could be no more prosaic greeting. It silenced Evelyn for a moment, then being resolved that this interview should not be such a failure as the interview with Armfield, she began nervously—

“As I am going away soon for my health,

I thought you would like to say good-bye, and so I came to see you and to—to——”

He interrupted her with a laugh.

“Going away for your health, and you select this as suitable weather for a walk! I congratulate you on your prudence, Evelyn.”

“Prudence,” she repeated, “one cannot always be prudent. It is contemptible to think always of one’s health; no one can whose feelings are excited.”

Allan shrugged his shoulders.

“It is by no means contemptible to spare your father needless anxiety.”

“I was not thinking of papa, I was thinking of you.”

Her voice was low and tremulous, and she turned her eyes towards him with that appealing glance which used to make Allan’s heart throb with passionate devotion. He was almost surprised at his cold calm. There was no quickening of his pulses, not even a pale reflection of past feeling fell on him.

“Were you? I rather fancy you were thinking of yourself, Evelyn.”

They were walking on slowly side by side.

“How unkind, how cruel you are!” she

burst out. "I am ill and weak, and I come out to see you, and to say I'm sorry if I have hurt you, and that I'm sure it was all a mistake, and then you receive me like this. You speak to me as if I were a stranger; I, who have been your promised wife; I, who have had my arms round your neck, and your kisses on my lips; I, who love you."

Evelyn always felt things dramatically, and this made her manner wonderfully genuine. She spoke rapidly now, with emotion in her voice. Her words roused Allan.

"You have hurt me as much—as much as it is possible for *you* to hurt; but your delicacy might have spared me the added pain of such a scene as this. Why should I bid you good-bye? You are ill, you are going abroad. Well, it is sad you should suffer. I feel sorry, always, thank God, that any one should suffer; not more sorry for you than for any girl in the village—perhaps less, for pain may teach you to be sincere, to be true, which you are not."

He lifted his head, and a flash of his eyes accompanied his words. He went on, giving Evelyn no time to speak.

"What is the object of this meeting?"

Nothing can do away with the unalterable fact that you listened to words of love in my absence, and spoke words of love yourself; that, being pledged to me, you gave caresses to another man. Deceitful as you have been, you have not the audacity to deny this. Do you want to judge of the effect of your faithlessness, to measure your influence on a man's life? I'll tell you, if you wish, what you have done for me. You have so destroyed my belief in you, that you might really love me to desperation now, and you could not touch my heart, for I could not trust you; and, to a certain extent, you've destroyed my faith in all other women; that is to say, I shall never accept in simple trust again, vows of truth and love, for *I shall remember*. But you have not destroyed my faith in all goodness, you were not strong enough for that, had not character enough for it. I have taken to this life, as you see" (he glanced down at his rough dress as he spoke), "to earn my bread honestly, and to see the lives of the miners quite near, but not by any means to kill myself because you've spoilt my life. Yet," he added bitterly, "I would not deprive you of a

tithe of your power. There is no doubt I should never have taken to this life, if you had not been false to me. I thank you most heartily that you forced me to break off our engagement. I might have dawdled on, propping up my vanity with the dream of being a great artist, or have gone into the Church, and have lived a life of scarcely conscious hypocrisy. I thank you, that being the woman you are, you let me wake so soon. Such a shock would not have been necessary, had you had a different soul. A great-hearted, faithful woman is the mainspring of a man's noblest deeds and words; she never, for momentary pleasure or gain, soothes him into a forgetfulness of the great ends of life, but is ever a prop, a spur, a comfort, the very soul of his soul; and if there be a God in heaven, Evelyn, such a nature is possible, such a nature lives, though my experience has been, and probably will be, bitterly the reverse."

Evelyn was powerless to check him, the words rushed forth. Once or twice she stammeringly tried to interrupt him, but he did not hear her or heed her,

At last, when Allan paused, she said in a tearful voice—"You are quite unjust. I am sure I am not selfish. I am as capable of sacrifice, of devotion, of constancy, as other women. You misunderstand me, and you'll be sorry, very sorry, some day for behaving so brutally."

Here she began to cry.

"I am sorry now. I shall be sorry as long as I live that we ever met, that I, of all men, should have loved you; but you have entirely passed out of my life now, and nothing can ever happen which can give me a fresh regret or change my feeling respecting that most unfortunate past."

"If you have any heart at all, you'll be sorry yet," Evelyn said angrily.

A sudden flash of resentment, and a desire to make Allan suffer, came into her weak nature, now that it could no longer occupy itself with a pleasing dream of romance. She felt at that moment as if she could have stabbed herself in Allan's presence, if she had felt sure that such an act would make his life a long, torturing remorse; but as she could not do this, she gave vent to prophetic warnings of a direful nature.



“I know you’ll remember this day, Allan,” she said passionately, “and regret your words and be bitterly sorry for all that you’ve said. You would not listen, you would not give me a chance of explaining. I don’t care; I don’t want ever to see you again. It’s cowardly to be rough with a weak young girl like me. I am very ill. I shall perhaps die.” (Here came a little sob.) “Other people have been just as deceitful. I hope you’ll be as miserable some day as you have tried to make me. I don’t care about you. I don’t love you any more. I am glad you have taken to a miner’s life, and are not going to be a gentleman any longer.”

She laughed hysterically as she ended.

Allan was silent. A slight, bitter smile was on his lips. It had begun to rain more heavily, and Evelyn, in the heat of conversation, had forgotten to hold up her umbrella. Moore looked at her.

“Will you go home now?” he said more gently. “You are getting quite wet through, and the cold may really harm you. You can take the short cut through the lane, and be at your house in a quarter of an hour, if you walk fast.”

“How considerate you are!” she answered. “Would it not be simpler for one of your straightforward nature to say that you wish I would go and leave you alone?”

“For God’s sake, don’t make such a fool of yourself, Evelyn, but take common care of your health in return for all your father’s love!”

“Please do not use such strong language,” she said scornfully, “it is so unnecessary. I am going home now.”

She turned off by the lane Allan had spoken of.

“Good-bye,” she added, as she parted from him. “I hope you’ll enjoy the life you’ve chosen and find amongst your refined companions that truth and goodness you are in search of!”

Allan made no reply, merely lifted his cap and turned away.

“Poor silly girl!” he thought. “I don’t suppose I’ll ever see her again. I’m glad she has heard the truth. She is swept clean out of my life, at any rate, from this day forth.”

Was she? How definitely we resolve to shape our course, and determine the influences

of our life ; and all the while something we know not of may be lurking in the dark to clutch us, something perhaps which we should scorn, if we knew of it, and whose power, like the night terror in a haunted room, we cannot measure till its grasp is on us.

Evelyn was very angry. She had done with Cairn Cove. She would go away to-morrow or next day. She had tried to be kind, and had been misunderstood. The people here were too coarse, too uneducated, to appreciate her. Now that her two attempts at making her life romantic once more had failed, Evelyn's thoughts turned with peevish hatred to the real author of her discomfiture—Nora. She it was who had told lies, who had poisoned Allan's mind. Of course Nora had grossly exaggerated, or Allan could not have been so steadfast in his opinion, as he had been to-day. Nora must have exaggerated, for she could never really have known anything about Mr. Armfield. Had she known, she would have understood how impossible it was for her, Evelyn, to have acted differently, without being quite brutal and heartless. Evelyn resolved to write to Nora before she went

away, and try, by her reproaches, to make her repent.

When Evelyn reached home, she was very wet, and was shivering. To her consternation, Dr. Holt met her in the hall, and angrily asked where she had been, and what she had been doing. Being cut off from her usual props, Evelyn felt that her indulgent father might be some comfort to her, so she went up to him, put her arm round his neck, and said tearfully—

“Don’t scold me, papa. I wanted to see Allan, because I thought perhaps I had not been quite kind to him, so I went out to meet him. He was rough and cruel, and said I told lies. I don’t want to stay here any longer. You may take me abroad whenever you like !”

Poor Dr. Holt had no word of reproach for his foolish child, but carried her tenderly up to her room.

A week passed, a week of growing illness for Evelyn. The risk of the journey to the south was great, but Dr. Holt feared still more allowing her to linger at Cairn Cove. He resolved to take Evelyn abroad himself, and wrote to his sister to join them at Pau.

Mrs. Langton, being a fashionable woman and much given to wanderings on the continent, wrote a long letter to her niece on the subject of dress, and the requirements in that respect of a watering place like Pau. On the receipt of this letter, Evelyn began to take a fresh interest in life. She pictured herself watched by every eye, as she was wheeled in a bath chair along the promenades. She felt no further desire for romantic interviews with either of her lovers. From day to day her mood varied ; sometimes she was in the highest spirits, sometimes in a state of languid depression ; and ever, as her bodily suffering increased, her sense of having been cruelly treated increased, and her feeling of resentment towards Nora, as the author of all her misfortunes, took deeper root.

At last, Evelyn left Cairn Cove. A few days before leaving home she had written a letter to Nora, full, as Evelyn considered, of just anger and dignified reproach, and alluding in veiled language to the retribution which was sure to overtake Nora sooner or later. To this letter Evelyn received no reply, and she was strengthened in her conviction that

she alone in this bleak place had any heart, any feeling.

Dr. Holt and his daughter went forth on their journey one dreary morning, when the sea mist was sweeping inland and the great rocks on the wild coast looked threatening in the dimness. Vaguely Evelyn still felt herself the centre of interest, and took leave of the familiar scenes with the feeling that those who had in this place taken such a part in her life were watching her departure unseen.

The one great tragedy which all men must act was soon to be played out by Evelyn Holt.

## CHAPTER IV.

## THE WATCHERS IN THE STORM.

CATHERINE having once secured Armfield, treated him with considerable carelessness, and such treatment resulted in increased infatuation on his part. His constant presence at The Dell began to bore Catherine. She had no fear of losing Armfield by her indifference, for she had studied his character and knew all his little weaknesses. Having made known his engagement, he was not a man to break it off. Intrigues, infidelities innumerable were always permissible *sub rosa*; but his position, his respectability demanded that there should be no scandal in the county with respect to a declared engagement. Now that Catherine was sure of her prize, she had a cooler head, she became more perfect in diplomacy. She played with Armfield's dis-

like of Clifford. It amused her to see the intolerance of a man who owed everything to position, for the reckless intelligence of a man who seemed to set wealth and high birth at nought, and to enjoy life without either the one or the other.

The little gleams of information respecting Clifford, which Catherine communicated to Trevor, coincided so entirely with particulars picked up by the coastguard officers, that Armfield began to trust to her for the knowledge he required, and she found it easy to deceive him on important points. She persuaded him that he was mistaken about Wreck Cottage being the store-house of the smugglers, and directed his attention to a place much further up the coast, where lived some fishermen who bore a character for marauding and recklessness. She pretended ignorance of the exact date when the *Sunlight* was expected, but finding that Armfield had by some means learnt the date the cutter was due, Catherine resolved to warn Clifford herself. She laid her plans quickly and well. She engaged a young fisherman, whom she took into her pay and confidence, to have a boat always ready for



her, and at the first signal from the *Sunlight* Catherine was determined to put off from shore and to let the captain know of the watch kept by the coastguard.

Surely such an act would win Clifford's gratitude! Surely his love would follow, unless—unless it were given to another, in which case the programme would change.

Catherine understood fully the risk of this scheme. Armfield, at all times filled with the jealousy of self-love, being now openly betrothed to Catherine, looked upon her as his property; and she knew that his jealousy, were there occasion for it, would now take a stronger form. His future wife, the woman whom all the county considered as the future mistress of Armfield Towers, must in no way compromise him, or cause a shadow of ridicule to rest on his name. Catherine knew well that if her passion for Clifford were to be discovered by Armfield, the jealousy of his pride of birth and position would rouse in him such fierce anger at being tricked, at being made a laughing-stock, that this anger might strike her or Clifford in some way which might blight their life. Therefore Catherine resolved to be

cautious. She was not prepared to sacrifice everything for her passion, she was only prepared to use all means to gratify it in safety.

The *Sunlight* was absent longer than usual, and the winds came. Rough weather would be unfavourable for Catherine's plan, and she grew impatient and irritable. She found it difficult to smile on Trevor always, and to assume a fitting delight at his visits. She never met Nora now without a laugh or a sneer. The impossibility of finding a vulnerable point in Nora was specially bitter to Catherine. Nora seemed to minister to old Thornton, to train her school of girls, to study in the library at The Dell, all with a sort of calm which Catherine could not understand. Somehow she seemed to have lived her life, and it seemed in the power of no mortal to hurt her greatly or greatly rejoice her. Was it, Catherine sometimes asked herself, with burning jealousy and anger, that it was all arranged between Nora and Clifford, and did this calm spring from Nora being sure of her lover and trusting him completely?

A month had passed since Evelyn Holt had gone abroad, one of the wildest months the

Cornish folk had known for long years. There were wrecks at Cairn Cove; and to Nora's growing school were added two little waifs, snatched from the waters, and claimed by none. Nora seldom saw Allan now; he never came to Wreck Cottage, and she never went to the studio. Whenever by chance they met, Allan's grasp of the hand was as warm as ever. Nora felt that half an hour's intercourse would restore them to their old intimacy; but she made no effort to seek him, she worked on. The *Sunlight* had been long absent, and the wild winds set people talking, and there was many a ghastly prophecy of evil to the fair cutter. Jos Thornton grew anxious; and Nora stayed late in the evenings at Wreck Cottage to share his fears, and talk over the dangers.

The roar of the wind seemed to rouse all the fire and youth in the old man, and always, as the cruel blasts shook the little house, he told Nora some weird story of the sea. She had begun to know these stories very well, but they never lost their interest for her, and she would sit, with her hands clasped, listening to them eagerly. Jos told them with the picturesque power of a simple, strong nature; and

the tales, being accompanied by the raging blast outside, thrilled Nora and filled her imagination with visions of wild waves and tossing ships, and men quailing at death or rushing to its arms without dread. On these stormy nights, when the *Sunlight* was watched for with such eagerness, old Jos would sometimes talk of Clifford, and then suddenly, as though he feared to think of him, would break off and turn to his own reminiscences.

At length the *Sunlight* was a week overdue, and one night, at the close of the week, the gale was wilder than ever. It had lashed the sea into such fury that it seemed as though its wrath could never be appeased, and that it must devour and destroy for ever. Old Thornton was uneasy, and his restlessness communicated itself to Nora. She did not want to go home that night; she felt she could not lie down in her bed, while she heard that howling wind, while she thought of old Jos pacing to and fro here, and from time to time going out to watch for signals. So Nora stayed at Wreck Cottage.

They opened the shutters of the little window, and put out the candles, so that they

could see a flash of light on the water if it came. Nora sat close to the window and kept watch. It was a very dark night, but by degrees she was able to distinguish objects outside, to see the waving trees, and even the white foam on the water.

“I’m growing very old, lass,” Jos said suddenly. He was walking up and down behind her chair. “I feel it to-night. In old times on a wild night, when there was danger, I never felt a dread. I felt I could conquer the winds somehow, snatch men’s lives from them ; and if sometimes the winds and the waves were too strong for me, and would have their victims, yet they could not make me fear. I rejoiced over the living, more than I mourned over the dead, except one, lass—except one. But now I’m like an old woman. I’ve got my nerves, as the French say, and am in a devil of a fright.”

“You are thinking of Mr. Clifford,” Nora said. “But perhaps he has never left France. He may be waiting for a change of wind.”

“Tut ! He starts to the day always, and is beating against this infernal storm now. The Lord send him safe !”

“You are very fond of Mr. Clifford ?”

“Fond! I don’t like the word—it’s weak; I love the lad. What a plucky fellow he is! That unflinching gleam in his eyes, I like it; and yet withal there’s not a touch of brutality in him, he is as tender as a woman.”

By the dancing firelight old Jos detected a slight smile on Nora’s lips.

“You are laughing at my warmth. You don’t know him as I do. He’s like a son to me; and, mind you, I never loved mortal that wasn’t worth loving. I often wonder why you don’t like him better than you do.”

He stopped his walk and peered at Nora.

“I do like him very much. He is just as a brother to me.”

“Brother! rubbish! Why does not your cheek flush and your heart throb when he comes? Why is there not a light in your eyes when you look at him, which makes the world beautiful for you and for those who look at you, eh?”

“I am not in love with Mr. Clifford. Is this what you wish to know?” she said quickly.

“I beg your pardon. Maybe I was forgetting

myself, though I fancy old Jos may say what he likes to you, child?"

Nora laughed. "I fancy he'll do so without permission."

"Listen to the blast! Hush!" He held up his hand.

With a hideous roar the storm rushed on. Could anything resist its power? It seemed to deceive men by a momentary lull, to hold back while they mustered their puny forces against its strength, and then with a wild howl of scorn to mock their resistance and sweep them away. There was the crash of a falling tree behind the cottage.

"Many a fine craft will be a useless hulk to-night. Many a fine fellow will have sand in his mouth before morning."

The door of the cottage opened, and borne into the room by the blast, in a blinding dash of sleet, was Allan Moore. It needed some force to close the door again.

"I've been down to the shore," he said, coming forward. "There's no sign of the cutter, thank God! She can't have left France."

There was no answer. Allan looked strangely excited.

"You are not afraid, are you?" he asked, walking up to Jos.

"Yes, I am," he answered roughly; "but what's the good of talking about it. Master Guy is a rare hand at sailing a ship, but, by the Lord, it would take an archangel at the helm to keep her off the rocks to-night."

He turned away from Moore as he spoke, and began pacing to and fro again.

Allan took a chair and sat down close to Nora.

She had not spoken. She looked at him when he was near her, and smiled. A wonderful softness was in her eyes, on her lips, over her whole face. Now that he was here, close to her, life seemed changed in a moment; the coldness, the sternness, the sadness gone. She shared his fears for his friend; she felt more anxious than she had thought it possible to feel.

"I've been keeping to myself and sticking to my work," Allan said at once. "I have not seen you, Nora, for many reasons; don't ask me what they are. I've come to-night most selfishly, because I can't stand the strain of anxiety alone. I remember your sympathy



of old. I thought it would do me good to see you."

"You've come back, that's the chief thing," she said gently, and stretching out her hand she stroked the sleeve of his coat. So thoroughly did she believe in the impossibility of Allan ever loving her, that the movement was simply kindly. So deep in her soul was her love for him, so changeless, being ever unaffected by any alteration in its unconscious object, that this little caress was pretty and tender, but betrayed no emotion and seemed natural to give. She wondered, during the few moments of silence that followed, why it was that people always came to her for sympathy and gave her so little. Was it that they thought her strong, and that she did not need help? She smiled sadly as she thought how different she was from the estimate others had formed of her. Many and many a time she longed for a soothing caress, such as is given to a weak, foolish child; for loving arms, whose very touch, unreasoning, unadvising, is rest and peace.

Presently Allan began to talk; he seemed too excited to be silent.

“I’ve tried five months in the mines, Nora—five months of absolute separation from the people I’ve been accustomed to live with, and I am beginning to lose all my class prejudices. Don’t you think it’s time?”

“You’ll hold just as wild theories as I do before long,” she answered, smiling.

“I don’t miss men of my own class, except Clifford, and it does not seem possible to me to do without him.”

Here a wild gust shook the house.

“Good God, what a night it is!” he exclaimed. “I should not be surprised if Clifford died young,” he said. “He is such a free, *debonnaire* creature, loving life, causing brightness and delighting in it himself. You and I, Nora, are not particularly fond of our lot, don’t cling over much to life; we are sure to live to the utmost limit of age. It’s always so.”

“Why do you look so wan and tired, Nora?” Allan asked.

He seemed suddenly to have dropped back into his old, fond friendship for her.

“You have not been worried, have you? Why don’t you look brighter?”

was sweet to her to hear him speak thus, she knew the interest he took in her was very deep ; but he had such tenderness of heart, she felt near him, nearer than any other man. She felt that her life would be full and happy, if she could but keep his simple life.

"I suppose I want to do more, to be more ; and perhaps straining after what is beyond me is wearing, and makes me look thin and anxious."

"Is that it? Well, I suppose you must always do this as long as you live, it's in your nature. I've given up all my aspirations, at least I've changed them. I no longer dream of a life of poetic sweetness, of the development of an artistic genius, and the gradual growth of the expression of beauty in the skill of my hand and in the harmony of my life. That's at an end, Nora. My aspiration now is for power. I can't be hurt when I'm strong. A blow with some men makes them set their teeth and put their shoulder to the wheel ; it has done so with me. You must hurt or be hurt, but I only want to strike at treachery and oppression and wrong. You must do it, if

you would help the deceived and oppressed and wronged, and you must be strong. I am only tender in one point."

"Guy?"

"Yes; that is the only thing that touches me personally. Anything may happen, and I shall be quite unshaken by it—anything except misfortune to Clifford; for the rest, I hold my soul in my hand, and don't care what I do for, or give to men."

"It is a strangely strong friendship, yours and Guy's. It is rare."

"I don't know, I see a good deal of faithfulness amongst mere workmen. The simpler lives are the truer. The complications of artificial life affect weak heads."

"How unlike you and Guy are," Nora said, looking at Allan.

"Not so unlike as you think. I know what he is."

"Your tastes are not the same; you look at life so differently."

"That does not matter. This is the great question in friendship—is there enough to hold to. There is enough that's admirable in Clifford to grapple me to him while I draw breath; whereas——"

He paused.

“Go on,” she said gently, “say the rest.”

“With Evelyn, I believed in the existence of such similarity of feeling that our natures could blend, and we could know perfect union. Was it not perfect?”

He laughed bitterly.

“I am not pained,” he continued, “by any reference to her now. I assure you all that is quite dead in me. I do not forget her, because she really was for a time a part of my every thought; but now she has no mental influence whatsoever, she is very far off from me. Good Lord, how far off she is!”

“You would not mind meeting her, talking to her? You would not long for the old days?” Nora asked quickly, eagerly.

“Most assuredly not. How can I waver about such things, Nora? Could you? Love is, or is not. In my case,” he added, “it most decidedly is not.”

After a little silence he continued—

“Perhaps you’ll be surprised to hear that I saw Evelyn before she left Cairn Cove. The meeting was none of my doing, I assure you. What her object was, I do not pretend to say.

I suppose she has not intelligence enough to recognize that I cannot be deceived any more. Where I placed my faith, I trusted blindly, thinking it dishonourable not to commit myself entirely into her keeping; but once forced to see that I was tricked, Evelyn must be a fool indeed to think that her intelligence can ever master mine."

"Evelyn looked ill; very ill?" Nora hazarded. She saw that the subject had some attraction for Allan, that he dwelt on it, and she knew that neither the pain, nor the interest was dead in him.

"Ill? yes; but all her ailments are so increased by her being quite self-absorbed, that it is hard to say how much of her suffering is genuine."

"I hope she'll get strong in the south."

Nora had been thinking much of her, wishing that she should have health, that she should be free from that false romance of pain, that she should be measured by her soul's worth, that her offences should not be condoned because of her body's weakness. Perhaps, vaguely, the shadow of the future touched Nora's thoughts. Foreknowledge of

life's sorrows visits some souls. How do we dare deny it; what do we know? All is mystery. For some, perchance, who are but slightly linked to visible things, the veil is lifted a little, and in their souls, and on their faces, is a light we know not, and would fain not see, because we cannot assert from whence it comes.

"Yes, I hope so; I wish her no harm," said Allan. "I don't want her punished for the pain she has given; but I suppose one can't help wishing that she may recognize the falsehood. And how can she do that, unless through pain? Yet this does not mean that I wish her to be hurt. I think you understand me, Nora."

"Quite."

She understood also that Allan thought of Evelyn more than he admitted even to himself. Not yet had he cast the dream out of his soul.

Thornton was standing close to the window, peering out into the darkness.

"Did you see a flash, either of you?" he asked, suddenly, excitedly.

"No," said Allan; "but let us go to the shore and watch."

“Yes, come ; but we’ll not do much good. We could never get the boat out in these breakers.”

He put on his sou’wester as he spoke, and turned to the door.

“You’ll keep house, lass, though it’s lonesome for you ?”

“No ; I’m coming, too.”

So they locked the cottage and went. In a few minutes they were on the beach.

It was a wild, grand scene. The great rocks looked gigantic in the gloom of night ; they seemed to be waiting for their prey, which the breakers were to cast to them. There was no moon to be seen, yet a cold light flickered across the waters at intervals, and showed the seething foam of the angry billows. Oh, the sucking horror of their deadly breathing ! Like the jaw of some ravening beast, the wave reared itself up. There was no mercy in sea or sky or air to-night.

Involuntarily Nora drew nearer to Allan, and put her hand in his arm.

“Thank you, Nora,” he said quietly ; “I am glad of your sympathy.”



All the while Thornton was silent but watchful.

“ Oh ! ” he said sharply, as a rocket shot up into the air.

They all saw it. There was an instant's intense silence, then Thornton said—

“ I don't think it can be the *Sunlight*, she knows the coast too well.”

“ You are not sure ? ” Allan said excitedly. “ Can't we get the boat out ? ”

“ What, you and I ? Don't be a fool, Mr. Moore. She could not live ten minutes in such a sea ! ”

“ Then what can we do ? ”

“ What I always do on a night like this—stand by to see what the waves will bring us.”

They were all silent after this. They stood close together, looking in the direction where they had seen the rocket.

“ Can't we rouse the coastguard ? ” asked Allan.

“ No ; I've lived here long enough to know what can be done and what can't.”

Allan offered no further suggestion. The wind showed not a sign of relenting ; the spray

of the pitiless waves was dashed in their faces, as they stood and watched.

“It’s horrible,” Allan whispered to Nora, “horrible to stand here and think that Clifford may be in that ship. Of course my thoughts rush on to the worst. I almost see the waves cast him here. Fate handles mortals so cruelly, destroys them without reason.”

No one spoke. They watched. Ten minutes, a quarter of an hour passed, then Thornton laid his hand on Allan’s shoulder.

“The rocket went up some way off,” he said. “She had twenty minutes before she could be driven on the rocks; a quarter of an hour’s gone.”

The old man’s hand tightened on Allan’s shoulder till the grasp was pain.

“Do you hear the sob in the wind?” he continued. “It’s going round. If I have not miscalculated, the cutter is safe!”

Nora looked in the two men’s faces; there was light in the sky now, and she could see them. She felt at that moment that life had enough of joy if she could so closely share the gladness or sorrow of those she loved.

In mute suspense they stood for the next

half hour, and during this time the sky had cleared, and the moon showed itself. Suddenly old Jos made a start forward.

“I see her! I see her!” he exclaimed excitedly. “Hurrah! hurrah!”

The old man seized his sou'wester and waved it frantically, then he shook hands with Nora and Allan, finally he stood quite still, and a few tears rolled slowly down his withered cheeks.

“I beg your pardon,” he said quickly, “for making a damned old fool of myself; but, you see, I love the lad—I love the lad.”

Neither of the others spoke. Allan was estimating at that moment the strength of his friendship for Guy, recognizing fully that he was the only soul who bound him to life. Nora was watching the approaching ship which slowly came in sight, showing its shattered condition, its mainmast gone and a sail rigged up temporarily to catch the wind, which at the last had had mercy. Nora was thinking sadly that though she were to give her life for Allan, not all the wealth of her love could ever soften to him the blow of losing Clifford.

How bitterly unequal love is! Is not this the true source of all pain?

## CHAPTER V.

### LOVES AND LURES.

A FEELING of peace came to Nora during the next few days. Allan's friendship seemed to have come back. She did not deceive herself. She knew that it was more than friendship she desired from Allan; she knew that nothing but the full and entire love of his heart could fill her with happiness; she felt no hope of this being hers, but his presence and his friendship alone glorified the world for her. All that made the joy of other women's lives—the love of a husband, the love of children—she could renounce, if only she were sure of Allan's friendship enduring always. She felt no shame in giving all her love unasked, she would have felt shame had she claimed any return for her love. Nora had an unusual nature. She felt strong to bear all pains so long as her own soul

was free from the consciousness of causing sorrow. Clear-sighted and intelligent though she was, she did not know herself as yet, life had not fully revealed her nature. She was not impatient to see Allan again. She thought he would gradually find pleasure in her companionship and affection as of old. She kept to herself for a little while, and dwelt upon the memory of that night when Allan had come back to her, when, sitting in Wreck Cottage and standing on the beach by his side, she had shared his thoughts and taken part in his disquietude. It was like a happy dream, which she strove to make as vivid as possible by thinking over it in solitude and shutting out her usual surroundings.

The dream faded in a few days, and Nora needed some fresh word from Allan. She went back to Wreck Cottage, and as she entered the little room she looked towards the spot where Allan and she had sat and talked, and the cottage seemed dearer to her—it seemed the sweetest place on earth.

Old Jos had scarcely begun to scold Nora for her absence when Clifford came in. He had been craving for this meeting, had been

haunting the cottage in the hopes of seeing Nora. He had heard how she had watched the *Sunlight* outride the storm, and he had a faint tinge of hope that her presence on the shore that night was due to some personal interest in him. Poor fellow! he was not vain, he only cherished a little hope.

Nora met Clifford with gladness, with more gladness than usual. Memories of that night made her greeting tenderer.

“Well,” he said, holding her hand as he spoke, “the cutter is not done for yet! I hear you were on the beach that night. Perhaps you were our good angel.”

Frankly his love shone in his eyes, was felt in the grasp of his hand. A little change came in Nora’s manner.

“Allan told you about our watch on the shore?”

She wanted to speak of Allan at once.

“Yes; but it was specially this old reprobate,” he said, looking with a smile at Thornton, “who told me how you three saw our danger. By George, I thought it was all up with us! The sudden shift of wind was our salvation; we weren’t a hundred yards from the rocks;

ten minutes more and the gallant *Sunlight* would have been dashed to pieces!" He was silent for a moment, then he added—"Moore had not much time to tell me about it, I only saw him for a quarter of an hour before he left."

"Before he left!" Nora repeated in astonishment.

"Did you not know that he had gone to Pau?"

"No. When?" she answered quickly.

"The morning after my arrival Allan had a letter from Dr. Holt, in which he said his daughter was dying. He begged of Allan to come without delay, as Evelyn wished to see him."

Nora put out her hand for a chair, and sat down without a word. She looked suddenly very white.

"Have I given you a shock? Are you ill?" Clifford asked tenderly. "I did not think you cared about the girl."

"No," she said, recovering herself. "I never cared about her; but she is so young, it seems so sad; Allan will feel it so much."

"Just the sort of thing that was sure to

happen," Thornton interrupted. "A fool of a woman, who all her life has roused an amount of pity she does not deserve, dies, and thereby puts a halo round her head like a martyred saint. Ten to one that Allan Moore, after her death, will repent everlastingly of the one sensible thing he ever did, namely, breaking off his engagement. There's the sort of harm women do! Wretched creatures, I've always said so."

"Perhaps she won't die," said Nora. "Oh, I hope she'll recover," she added pathetically.

"In the name of fortune, why?" asked Thornton.

"Don't talk like that," Nora said impetuously. "Every life is important, is so bound up with other lives, involves so many people. Oh, you don't know; none of us know."

Thornton looked sharply at Nora. His keen eyes rested on her for some minutes; her manner seemed a revelation to him. Clifford only thought that Nora's tender heart was touched; he loved her better for her wide sympathy with all lives, however insignificant.

"There's room enough for all," he said, "and I don't wish any one out of the world;



but I can't be sorry for any event which puts an end to the possibility of Allan's ruining himself by marrying that girl. If she should die, he can't be fool enough to go about lamenting that he did what was right in breaking with her."

"Did Allan say he would write to you?"  
Nora asked eagerly.

"He did not promise."

"If you hear of—of Evelyn, will you tell me?"

"Certainly."

Nora rose.

"Going so soon?" old Jos asked.

"Yes."

She did not know why she was going, she was bewildered; she was thinking of Evelyn's letter, written before she left Cairn Cove—a letter which, at the time, seemed to Nora but the outcome of petulant anger at the failure of her schemes, but which now had changed its aspect. Nora went towards the door. A question arose in her mind. Had she wrought evil by her interference? The question gave her a shudder: she thrust the thought aside.

“I am coming with you,” said Clifford. “I want to talk to you.”

Nora did not look surprised, she let him accompany her. They walked together in silence for a little while, then Clifford said—

“I want you to advise me—will you?”

His voice was low and tender. Something in the tone touched her. She made an effort over herself, and shook off the painful thoughts which were thronging her brain. She had been seeing Allan by Evelyn’s death-bed, she had been listening to their words.

“I’ll try,” she said, looking up at Clifford.

“It seems that your step-sister has got hold of some of the *Sunlight’s* secrets. She knew that Wreck Cottage is our depôt. She knew when the cutter was due; she knew our signals.”

“How has she learnt all this?”

“I don’t know; but there’s a traitor in our camp, that is plain.”

“Why has Catherine taken the trouble to find out all these things?”

“I am not sure.”

“She has no particularly kind object in it, I fancy.”

“Has she not? That’s what I should like to know. It seems Armfield has set the coast-guard officers on the watch, and has told Catherine about it. She has misled Armfield to shield the *Sunlight*—that seems kind.”

Nora was silent.

“Will you tell me frankly what you think about it all? You are intelligent, and one of my best friends.”

Nora had given full attention to Guy. She wanted to help him. “Catherine must love you,” she said impulsively.

The way this was said was a stab to Clifford; it told him that it mattered nothing to Nora who loved him.

“She is engaged to Armfield,” he replied.

“And does not love him,” Nora added quickly. “I have never cared for Catherine,” she went on. “She seems to have a nature which repels me; but I’ve often thought if she loved any man very, very much, she might be changed. If the love were returned it might make her a very different woman.”

“Do you want me to love her?” he said roughly, with a laugh.

“I beg your pardon. I did not exactly

mean that, for I do not really know if she loves you. But I fancy she loves you," Nora continued. "If for your sake she has run the risk of rousing Armfield's jealousy, can you not like her a little, Guy? It is sad for a woman to give all her thought, her love to a man who is indifferent. I am sure she is brave enough to tell Armfield the truth, if once she knew it herself. She is no coward, whatever her faults may be."

Clifford began to laugh, and there was such a ring of mockery in his laugh, that Nora looked up and said quickly—

"Why are you amused? You are kind enough, intelligent enough, to see that it is not happy for any woman to love some one who laughs at her."

"I am not laughing at your step-sister—I'm not such an insolent brute," he said with real anger in his voice; "but I think it exquisitely ludicrous that *you* should tell me to love her—*you*, Nora! Have I not spoken plainly enough? Have you not seen how I love *you*? Must I tell you always, every day I live, that I love you madly, passionately—that there is nothing in the world that you could ask me

to do for you that I would not do. If you need me to speak again, so that you should fully understand, I'll tell you a million times, I'll swear it by all I hold most sacred—I love you, Nora; I swear before God, I love you! Don't be frightened, dear," he said more gently, "but for God's sake don't drive me to the caresses of another woman. I might go; but, if I did, I'd cast her aside after a little while like a broken toy! What can any woman be to me since I've known you, except a day's, an hour's pastime?"

"I can't realize that you care so much about me. I can't understand how a man, who, by his own admission, has had fancies, passions, love, whatever you may call it, for numbers of women, can have a very deep affection for one. I may be inexperienced, I may know nothing of life, I may be cold myself, I don't know; but it seems to me that a woman who loves you ought to make you happy, and it ought to be easy to you to love her. I speak very plainly, you see."

"Very," he said bitterly; "and we will speak no more on the subject, please. That is your road, this is mine," he added, "and I'll say good-bye."

Something in his tone made Nora look at him inquiringly. He took her hand, and as he looked in her eyes his face softened a little.

“I would not say a harsh word to you, Nora, but there are some things a man cannot tamely listen to. I believe you’ve a kind heart, but your words to-day are the cruellest I have ever heard—the cruellest I am ever likely to hear.”

Then he wrung her hand, dropped it suddenly, almost flung it from him, and turned away. Nora went onwards to The Dell, carrying with her the remembrance of Clifford’s reproachful eyes, and asking herself, in bewilderment, was it always to be her lot in life to hurt those whom she loved, or those who loved her; was she destined to be a blind instrument of evil?

Fate, the devil, or whatever bad influence pervades life, owes much of its power to *le talent d’à propos*. Clifford had not left Nora ten minutes when he met Catherine. By accident or design she overtook him as he walked to the village, and found the moment propitious for the unmasking of her passion.

Clifford was sorely wounded by Nora, and—

while he scorned her suggestion that he should listen to the whisperings of Catherine's love, he practically did what Nora advised. He turned to Catherine with a sort of gladness and a desire to forget, in her flattery and warmth, the coldness of the woman he really loved.

Clifford let Catherine glide her arm into his as they walked along the country road. Her head was dangerously close to his; her hair, blown by the wind, touched his cheek; and her eyes, with all the power of passion, caressed him, wooed him as only the eyes of a woman, violent in love and hate, reckless and unscrupulous, can do. Simplicity can never have the power of duplicity; mystery fascinates mankind.

"You did not know," she murmured, "that I was on the shore the night of the storm? You did not know why I watched and what I had planned?"

"No," he answered; "tell me."

He was interested.

"My magisterial *fiancé*," she said, with a laugh "having instructed the coastguard, and having set his heart on arresting you, I thought I would outwit him. For a long time

I have had a boat and a devoted slave in waiting at the creek below Wreck Cottage; and had the night been fine, and had there been any danger of your being waylaid on landing, I'd have put off from shore at the first signal from the *Sunlight*, and have warned you of the plot."

"You'd have done this for me? By George! I'm not worth the trouble."

"Perhaps not. We women love what we love, and whether the object be valuable or valueless makes little matter."

She laughed again, and the sound of her merriment had a recklessness in it which suited with Clifford's mood.

"I'm a thorough sailor," he said, taking the hand which rested on his arm. "You know what a sailor's reputation is in love?"

"Changeable. Well, what of that? Constancy is *fade*. One loves whilst one can, and a year of some men's love is worth a lifetime of the love of others."

While Catherine said this with a smile, he glance swept over Clifford, and her eyes, if he could have read their language, said plainly that, if he accepted her love she would hold



him in chains, or make him pay dearly for breaking them.

“And this\* squire of high degree, this administrator of justice, when are you going to marry him?” he asked, with a grimace.

“Probably not at all.”

“Is it possible,” he asked, turning towards her with a sudden flash of answering passion in his eyes, “that you would choose a penniless sailor for a lover rather than a rich squire for a husband?”

“A penniless sailor and a smuggler,” she said, not answering his question. “Come, admit you are a smuggler.”

“I admit nothing,” he replied, with a laugh, and a toss of the head which seemed to set the world at defiance. “I am anything people like to think me. I give no account of my actions.”

Catherine loved Clifford more desperately than ever at that moment, seeing that she could not bend him to her will, nor extract his secrets from him.

“You are right,” she whispered, pressing his arm and leaning towards him.

Then her step grew slower and her eyes

sought his, and a torrent of caressing words came from her lips. For once she was true and no actress, and had Clifford's heart been free, had she found the full response which her self-absorbed nature required, God knows what change might have come in her. Perhaps her soul might have been awakened; perhaps the best in her might have conquered the worst.

All that was passing and worthless in Clifford, Catherine roused, but the pure affection and reverence which was deep in the soul of him, she could not touch.

Catherine knew the conditions, so thought Clifford. He had spoken plainly enough, she could not deceive herself about him; the pleasure was equal perhaps, life too short for prudery and prudence, and she was right perchance.

So Clifford's arm was round her in an instant, and his kisses passionate enough to satisfy her sensual nature.

Had she enslaved him, she would have tired of him, forgiven and forgotten; but his soul was free, and the time would come when her passion, because it could not master and satiate itself, would avenge and destroy.

CHAPTER VI.

DYING WORDS.

MANY times during the next fortnight Clifford and Catherine met ; the former was attracted in spite of himself. Nora gave no response to his love. There did not seem in her even a recognition of the depth of his affection, and so he snatched at the pleasure of a less worthy passion. Catherine's burning words were often in Clifford's ear, and his reckless nature was roused. There was a fever in his blood when he was with her. It seemed easy to answer her glances with looks as passionate ; easy to take her in his arms and caress her ; easy to murmur sentences which had been often murmured to other women ; easy to assume—nay, to feel a love which had no root in his soul, which sprang from no true admiration, which was to lead to no life service, but which, from its very

transitoriness, was the more maddening, the more absorbing. He was twenty-seven; and she? She was one of those women formed by nature to win only a worthless and passing passion; and, by a strange contradiction, she was a woman who claimed as her right a devoted and enduring affection, which she was neither capable of inspiring nor appreciating.

During these days Clifford avoided Nora. He did not wish to have thoughts roused within him by her clear, blue eyes—eyes which rested on him always with a strange expression of inquiry, as though she were reading his soul. This man, fearless and independent, who gave no thought to the judgment of his fellows, shrank from the glance of this girl when he felt unworthy of her love.

During this fortnight, though Clifford knew it not, Nora tried again and again to see him, for she craved for tidings of Allan; and as the days passed, and no news reached her, a slowly growing dread took possession of her mind. She could not have explained it, she could not have said clearly what this was, but the very air seemed laden with a coming sorrow.

Nora felt no wonder when, at the end of this

dreary fortnight, she received a letter from Allan, asking her to go to his studio to see him, as he wished to speak to her for a short time without interruption.

The few words of Allan's letter seemed strangely cold and severe. Nora went to this meeting as a prisoner might go to hear his sentence pronounced. She was not a timid fool, full of fancies and maudlin sentiment. She had faced life bravely hitherto; but to-day, as she walked to the studio, her brain was oppressed and confused, her feet seemed to refuse to advance.

It was a cold December day, and to Nora nature looked more cheerless than it had ever done before. For a little while she flung away the dread, and almost laughed at her dreariness; then she felt this was mere acting, and her steps grew slower and her heart heavier.

At length Nora reached the studio, and stood in the bare room, where all she had known of joy had come into her life. There was a change in the place surely, for it seemed forbidding to her.

Allan stood at his easel. There was a sketch of Evelyn over the fireplace, there was a sketch

of Evelyn on the table, and, on the canvas before him, Allan was painting her portrait from memory.

He turned towards Nora when she entered, and began to speak ; but his face was still, with an unnatural stillness: the movement of his lips seemed in no way to lessen its changelessness.

“Excuse my asking you to come,” he said; “there are some things I must say. I will not keep you very long.”

He placed a chair for her ; he did not shake hands, and his voice had a low, lifeless tone. Nora did not sit down.

“Of course you asked me to come,” she answered, rather impatiently; “don’t apologize about it.”

“You and I,” he continued, his eyes resting on the ground, “have made a cruel mistake, have done a terrible wrong. You know, of course, that Evelyn is—is dead.”

Nora gave a sudden start, a little cry of pain came from her lips.

“I did not know,” she said.

“She died,” Allan went on, in the same monotonous tone, “four days after I reached

Pau. I was with her during those four days ; I was with her when she died." He paused a little, then continued, "I take my full share of the evil we have wrought ; but I must tell you her words—I have promised to do so—though I do not blame you more than I blame myself."

"Speak," Nora said quickly ; "tell me every word, no matter what it may be."

"Evelyn admitted she had been a foolish child, and had perhaps trifled with Armfield, but always her heart had been true to me. She told me to say that the sorrow brought into her life by your cruel report of her conduct had destroyed that life. She wished you to know it, she wished you fully to understand it, that you might never so hurt any other woman."

Nora listened silently, her eyes very wide open, her lips just parted ; she seemed stunned by his words.

"Evelyn spoke to me of the time that passed after I had cruelly broken off our engagement in blind, selfish rage, and all she said was corroborated by Dr. Holt. She lingered on here, hoping that my love would return ; she

neglected her health, she did not care for life ; grief quickly increased her natural delicacy ; when she left Cairn Cove, it was too late to save her. She has told me to say to you that though, perhaps, you did not mean to be cruel, the result of your words has been terribly cruel ; that she was too young to die, and that if you had left her the love and tenderness which was hers, she might have lived a long, long time, and have grown year by year a better and a happier woman." Allan had all this time kept his head bent and his eyes fixed on the ground ; now he looked at Nora as he added, "I have given you Evelyn's message. It was a sacred promise to do so ; but though she freed me from blame, I know what I have done. I ought never to have listened to your words. My self-love was wounded, my jealousy was roused. From having believed Evelyn perfect, I rushed to the baseness of believing her vile ! I should have done everything to prove her good and true. Instead of this, I accepted at once the statement that she was false, and tried to find confirmation of it. We have done evil, Nora," he said, raising his voice a little. "You may forget it ; I never can ; and



the memory of Evelyn will be with me always while I live."

"Oh, not wilfully," Nora said, pleading more for him than for herself; "neither of us have done such a wrong wilfully. Perhaps Evelyn was not wicked, only weak. It is hard sometimes to be truthful; when the truth hurts we are all cowards. I asked her, I begged her to speak. I thought it right to tell you everything. Evelyn must have died soon, she was so frail; surely we did not kill her, Allan, we could not have killed her!"

Allan's face was cold and stern. He offered no grain of comfort to Nora, he took none for himself.

"Yes, we did," he said fiercely, after a minute's silence, as if suddenly roused. "It does not take much to crush the life out of a slender, frail child like Evelyn—a cold blast, a cruel word. She died in my arms. Do you mean to tell me she was untrue on her death-bed? It is a poor atonement to acknowledge the wrong I have done; but, at least, I've the manliness to do that."

"Listen to me, Allan," Nora said, stepping nearer to him, and filled with a desire to shield

him from remorse. "Yes, it was my doing. I suppose I distorted things; I must have distorted things. I was afraid of your being deceived; I thought you worthy of faithful love; I thought deception would ruin your life; I thought you would be a great artist, that you had a great mind, that nothing must spoil your career. Oh, I don't know what I thought. I fancied I was doing right. I loved truth, and I spread falsehood. It was all, all my doing. Let me bear the sin and the punishment of it. Evelyn was right to forgive you, and to say it was my doing. You must remember her words, and not reproach yourself; leave it all to me to bear."

"Your remorse does not in the least lessen mine," Allan said quietly. "You cannot help me by talking wildly. It is all over. You must bear your memories, and I mine. I do not wish ever to see you again. When I look in your face I'll always remember that I listened to your words, and believed them, and destroyed the young life that was given to me to cherish. My poor dead love will always stand between us. Friendship with you is impossible. I have told you Evelyn's words, and mean to

part from you to-day for ever. I hate remnants of things. I don't wish you any harm, and I hope your life will not be as void as mine; probably it will not be, your feeling cannot be similar to mine."

There was silence for a little while. Nora looked in Allan's face, the face of the man she loved so utterly, and could find no syllable to say in her defence, could beg no gentle word from him, had no hope. She could only feel she had no past, no future, no link with life save for this moment while Allan was there, and she could hear his voice. The moment was passing, she had no power to stop it, no power to change the thoughts which were cutting her adrift from him for ever. She gazed vacantly into his eyes, and did not move nor speak.

"I think you had better go," he said quietly, looking up at her.

Then he turned towards the easel, and his eyes rested on the unfinished picture of Evelyn.

A minute longer Nora stood immoveable. Could she part from him thus? Could she let him go his dreary way, while she went hers, each bearing a weight of remorse? No

more loving friendship, no more laughing counsel and companionship; it was not possible. She had asked no greater place in his life than that of a friend; was even this to be taken from her? If so, love was worthless, truth was worthless; dissimulation and expediency were the best, the only weapons to fight with!

Nora put her hand to her head, her brain seemed to whirl. Could she find no appropriate word? If she went away now silently, this chapter of her life would be closed forever, and, God knows, she did not care to open another. Oh, things could not end thus!

"Allan," she began. Her voice was hoarse now and then it shook from her emotion. "Allan, I swear I meant to do what was right. I don't think there was any evil or mean thought in what I did; but I suppose I misunderstood Evelyn quite. You would never, never have doubted her if it had not been for me. How could I think it would end thus so terribly? I prized your friendship, I thought I *must* be truthful to you; but I was wrong—I should have been silent."

Nora spoke rapidly, feverishly, but then

was no defence in her words—no force. She seemed to have no mental power to face this new position of pain ; she only feebly struggled to keep off this cruel fate of separation from Allan. Her words seemed to make no impression on him.

“You won’t take your friendship away quite?” she pleaded. “You won’t let me think always, always that I have made you miserable? I—I, who——”

She drew her breath quickly, pressed her hands tightly together, and checked the words which were on her lips. There was just a moment’s silence, then she added—

“I, who have felt like your sister, Allan, and have delighted in sharing your interests and ambitions.”

Her last effort was over, and she knew it had failed, knew that her fate could not be warded off from her.

“Some things are irrevocable,” Allan said slowly. “You have intelligence enough to see this. It is quite true that, but for your letter, I should never have doubted Evelyn, and my love would have saved her. The joy of my life is destroyed, you must see that ;

there is no use in my denying it to you, it would be folly to do so. Can't you recognize," he went on, with more excitement, "that I cannot give you my friendship? I think you did not mean to hurt Evelyn and me. When I don't see you, I'll think of you vaguely as the unlucky instrument of a hard fate; but if I tried to keep up any intimacy with you, perhaps I should hate you. Men who are very unhappy are generally unjust. This will always be before me"—here he pointed to the picture on the easel—"and I imagine regret will grow stronger as time goes by."

Nora was standing close to him now, and could see that the picture he had been painting was of Evelyn in her last days, with the stamp of coming death on her fair young face.

For a few minutes Nora looked at Allan, and all the passionate purity of her unselfish love shone in her sad, tender eyes. After this mute farewell she turned away, and, with bent head, left the studio.

## CHAPTER VII.

### REMORSE AKIN TO MADNESS.

ONE, two; three days passed, but how they passed Nora knew not. Each hour seemed a repetition of the former one. She taught in her little school; she played and laughed with the children in the village, who had grown accustomed to her coming amongst them; she studied, mastering some difficulties in a swift way which astonished Thornton; but, whatever her occupation, every hour of the day was alike to her, for underlying all words, all actions, was the gnawing thought of the misery she had brought on Allan. She battled with it, but her strength to resist the remorse that seized her seemed daily less.

Going, in the dusk, to Wreck Cottage on the fourth day, she caught a glimpse of Allan in the distance, as he turned towards the

mines. Nora fled from him. She ran along the path up the hill, till she reached the cliffs above the bay, where the *Sunlight* was often moored; there she sat down, breathless. It was blowing hard, and she was buffeted by the bitter December wind.

How things kept crowding into Nora's head as she sat by the sea, there, on that great grey rock overhanging the angry waters! The winds and the waves held sway over all the world, grand in their fury, wild and beautiful. A fierce gust caught her hat. Nora watched it whirled upwards for a moment, then tossed to the waves, which played with it for a moment, then buried it in their green depths. Nora drew her shawl over her head, and looked down. If she slipped over the edge, she would be as quickly gone. Why not? She would explain to Evelyn. She would atone. Why was this thought of atonement always in her head now, always? How irrational, how weak, to think that she had even hastened Evelyn's death! It was rapid consumption that had killed her. The disease was in her family; it had killed them all. Yet, why should Evelyn have said that she, Nora, had



caused her death? Do people die with a lie on their lips? If so, she must follow Evelyn, and make her acknowledge the lie. If there was any sort of life after death, she would see Evelyn, and make her take back her words, make her say, "Yes, you were right; I was deceitful, and I must have died, whether you had spoken or not." If, after death, there was no life, and Evelyn had perished utterly, then she should perish likewise, and this leaden weight would be gone. Oh——

Nora drew herself up from her bent position, as if to cast off the weight, but sank down again, and drew her shawl tightly about her.

The wind was cold, and howled dismally. It tore along with a rush of its great wings, and then, amongst the trees at the hill top, wailed out its wrath in sobs and sighs, as if the boughs had soothed its bitterness and turned its rage into tears. Beneath, there was the measured beat of the waves against the rocks; and the white foam, caught by the winds, was sometimes dashed in Nora's face, and seemed a blow of scorn.

The sea gulls could not struggle against their fate; why should she? One or two faint

flutters of their wings, and they were borne down on the blast. They let themselves go. What a feeling of wild delight to be caught by the blast and to yield, not as Orithyia to Boreas, not to the embrace of love, but of death! Love! She had hurt the man she loved, taken his joy from him, blasted it by her evil tongue; this was the end of her devotion. How she had loved him!

The wild look faded from her face.

Men said it was not possible to love on and on without a gleam of hope; not possible to begin to love without one spark of answering passion. They did not know. It had been possible for her. When Allan had kissed her that day he went away to Italy, so tenderly, yet without one thought unfaithful to Evelyn, so calmly, that kiss had intensified all her devotion, had crowned with an instant's rapture all her love.

Nora closed her eyes, and lived the moment over again. She had done so often, and this was all the joy her life held.

How was it she had refrained from throwing her arms round his neck that day, and clinging to him? She had refrained. She had re-

turned his caress quite gently, lip to lip, and he had not guessed, though her hand trembled in his, and her lips burned.

Nora bent down her head, and swayed slowly from side to side.

After that, came days of calm. She loved him peacefully; and, though she knew he would never love her, she scorned the weak sentiment of fretting her life away, and even to herself made no moan. Then he loved Evelyn. Ah! After a little while she read the girl's mind so clearly. Why should he love her in blindness? Why should she look on and see the man she loved deceived? So she spoke.

Then the dead face of Evelyn seemed before her.

Surely, there were no lies and hypocrisy in that pure, white calmness? She had been mistaken, blinded by passion, and had sent Evelyn to death, had given Allan a life of pain. Did she love him? Had she ever loved him? How had she proved her devotion? By hurting him? Surely, her love was not akin with the love of men, who love and destroy; akin with the love of weak women,

who cling and weep and take the heart out of men's lives. No, she did not want to die, even if the storm could sweep her away ; she wanted to live and atone, to prove to herself that her love had never been ignoble, unworthy. But, how could she atone ? Life rolled on in such dreary routine. There was always opportunity for mistakes and evil, for slow dropping into "shapelessness of life ;" but for noble self-sacrifice, for working out exalted aims, there was little chance. She had weakened Allan's hands, taken all the springing delight out of his work. How could she atone ?

Nora looked out blankly on the waters, and found no answer. The black clouds sent down a drenching shower, which the wind caught and dashed against the rocks and trees, and against Nora's bent figure ; but she did not move, only cowered a little before its fury and sought in nature, in herself, for some hope, some aim without which it would be quite impossible to form her life at all. She could not go back without some sort of resolve ; she could not preserve her life for nothing, for continued hurtfulness only.

The rain ceased, as if its outburst of petulance had passed; and Nora, looking up at the hurrying clouds, saw now in one spot a faint whiteness, showing through the gloomy grey.

If the darkness and gloom relented, and there in that one spot the blue of heaven shone through, might she not take it as a token? Man was dumb to her, gave no sign of help, perhaps the wild sky would be kind.

She watched the little speck of whiteness with growing eagerness; she stood up, as if to be nearer to it, and leaned forward in perilous proximity to the cliff's edge. The clouds seemed to sweep round this spot, taking with them a little of the grey gloom, and at last, just for the twinkling of an eye, a clear, sweet blue gleamed through a rift, and then was quickly covered.

Nora sat down again. The rain swept over her, and she was heedless of it. A hand touched her shoulder. It made her start and shiver, and she looked at Guy Clifford for a moment without any recognition in her eyes. What had her thoughts to do with him?

“ Good God! Nora,” he said, with the thrill

of emotion in his voice, "what are you doing in this place?"

She did not answer. Her hands were wet and cold; her shawl, which was drawn over her head, was so soaked with the rain that it clung to her pitifully, as if its efforts to shelter her were vain, and her face looked old and hollow.

Clifford took her hand; he led her away from the edge of the rock. She yielded, watching his face with a strange, inquiring expression. At last he could not bear it any longer. He stopped and faced her.

"Nora, you did not mean to——" he stammered. "Why were you there? Oh, God, it's not possible! And I would give my life for you; and it's no use, no use!"

She understood what he feared now.

"No," she said quietly, in a dull, stricken way; "I would not have killed myself. I came up here to watch the storm and to think, and the thinking bewildered me a little. No," she continued, after a little pause, "my death would not do any good, except to myself, and that's not what I want. I feel tired, very tired sometimes, but I can bear any amount

Of suffering, and it does not matter. Forgive me," she added, after another pause, and with an air of dignified reserve peculiarly her own—"forgive me for talking of myself. You are my only friend."

"Never more than that, Nora?—never more than that?" he said pleadingly, his full lips quivering, and his blue eyes full of passionate tenderness. "Can I never draw you to my heart and hear all your thoughts and troubles whispered in my ear, never caress the sweep of your delicate throat, never clasp your sweet arms round my neck, and make you know, when my lips touch yours, how I love you?"

She looked at him dreamily, with a dawning thought seeming to strengthen in her expression.

"You love me like that?" she said gently.

She was thinking of her own love for Allan. Just that longing, just that passionate devotion which she read in Guy's every feature as he stood by her now. And Guy was Allan's friend, the one being whom Allan loved in this world. She knew so well what she was dealing to Guy—the pain, the weariness—she had measured it all to the end. She took Clifford's

hand in hers, and looked at him as if she were seeing something very far off beyond him.

“Would it make you happy if I gave myself to you?” she said softly. “Do you think the joy would be what you fancy, that it would make your life sweeter, calmer?”

“Do I think so, Nora? I must have told you very poorly, very badly how I love you, if you can ask me the question! I am a rough fellow, darling,” he added, and his voice trembled as he spoke, “and an awful scamp, but I know I love you—oh, endlessly—and there is nothing in this wide world would give me joy such as the joy of your being my wife.”

“Your wife,” she repeated slowly, dropping his hand and drawing back from him a little. “No; you don’t understand. That is not what I mean. I could not be your wife. No, it does not seem right to take such vows. One must stand by a man’s side pure and good to do that, and he must know all that is in one’s heart.”

She spoke very slowly and sadly.

“No, I don’t mean that, Guy; but if you care to take me and leave me when you are



tired of me, perhaps I've no right to refuse to give you joy. It can't hurt any one. What can it matter?"

An expression of rage and horror came in Clifford's face. Then he looked at her closely, searchingly, with a curdling chill at his heart. She seemed calm and weary. No, there was no madness in her eyes. This, that she had said, was said in all sincerity. Then he burst out suddenly, with a wild upward movement of one hand—

"Your words have hurt me more than anything, more than your hate could do. I must have misunderstood. You do not offer yourself to me as my mistress?"

She bowed her head slowly.

"Then I refuse you, and scorn you for it; You have heard that I am wild. Well, yes, I am. I drink, I toss away my time and money on anything that amuses me. I have had mistresses—oh, I need not shrink from saying so to you now—but I have never given them my soul; they have been women who took my caresses for what they were worth. I never deceived any woman. But you, Nora, I never had an unholy thought about you.

When I came near you I buried my recklessness and wild life. It seemed that some other man had lived it, not my real self—the man who loved Nora Severne. Now I may go back to the worst part of me, and forget the best! In God's name, child, why have you done this? I can't understand—unless—unless——”

The look of horror deepened in his face. She understood him.

“No, no,” she said hastily, and a deep blush spread over cheeks and brow. “Don't think me worse than I am. In act I am as innocent as a child. I don't know what my thoughts have done, they've gone into wild confusion, and you can't understand; it is impossible. This magnificent offer that I make you,” she added with a bitter smile, “it is my first; and why should I not make it? You see, you are not a student of men and manners. I've had nothing else to do, and I begin to think that there is a great deal of cant and false shame in most people. I think that thus I might make you happy for a time, and then you would be cured of your fancy for me, for if you get a hundredth part as tired of me as I am of

myself, the cure will be perfect." She laughed. "You see," she continued, "that which one longs and longs and waits for in vain, wears the heart out of one ; whereas, if you win it—who knows ? Is not attainment destruction in most things ?"

Her shawl had fallen back off her head, and revealed fully her face, which was flushed feverishly, showed her sad, strange eyes, which now seemed to have caught the colour of the green waters.

Guy looked at her. Would it ever be possible to him to scorn her or love her less ?

"You are troubled, love," he said tenderly—"distressed about something. Can't I help you ? I'll forget all you said ; you did not mean it."

"I do not wish you to forget it," Nora answered quickly. "I've thought of these things so often, and on such subjects the wisest and best have differed. Why should one eternally think of one's self and this poor, pitiful body ? It will soon be no longer warm and soft and beautiful."

The tenderness faded out of Clifford's face, and his lips grew stern.

“To some extent we *must* think of ourselves. A woman must follow her own sweet, natural instinct, and guard her soul and body, and give them only where she loves; and the men who tell you otherwise are liars and scoundrels, corrupters of the natural delicacy and goodness of a woman’s heart! God help you, if you give yourself up to their guidance! I’ve no right to blame you,” he went on fiercely; “my own life does not justify me in doing so; I’d be an infernal hypocrite if I did. But, Nora, I tell you this, that if you were thinking of going over the cliff there just now”—he pointed to the place where she had been standing—“it is a pity I stopped you. There are some things worse than that.”

Then he turned on his heel, and went away from her.

Nora watched Clifford disappear, and then she took the path round the far side of the hill to her home.

Perhaps she had done some good, she thought with a tired smile; disgusted Guy, and now his foolish fancy would die out. If he ceased to think her better than other women, perhaps he would cease to love her.

She might do one good act, she might set him free from her fascination. She had read in his eyes the suspicion that had flashed into his mind; he thought her quite bad and abandoned. Nora felt a hot glow of shame pass over her as she recalled Clifford's expression.

It was natural enough that he should think her shameless. It did not matter, if only she cured him of his infatuation. She had always been free and independent in her ways; she had only to be a little more so, to go about at late hours and let herself be seen with men alone. All this would confirm to-day's revelation, and thus she could cut herself off from Clifford, from Allan, from every one. She would not bring any sadness into other lives; and for herself, what did she care? Of what value was the judgment of others? If she succeeded in being shunned and slandered, it would only prove this which she had always thought, namely, that there were false weights and false measures for everything in life, and that, tried by them, it was best to be found wanting.

Nora raised her head and walked more

firmly. She knew herself to be pure in thought. She could pass through slander and ill fame with an unstained conscience. There was the one blot which nothing could wash out; but at least she would bring no further sorrow, work no further woe to any soul, by her love or hate.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHO LOSES AND WHO WINS ?

THE first few days after Nora's interview with Allan, the former, absorbed though she was by her own troubles, noticed a singular change in Catherine's manner towards her. Now and then, Nora asked herself what it meant, but all curiosity on the subject faded out as quickly as it was roused, for one thought alone held Nora's mind under its cruel dominion.

Catherine's apparent amiability in these days was quite explicable. The course of her passion for Clifford had been running smooth. They met often, they met gaily : sometimes on board the *Sunlight*, sometimes at The Dell, but discreetly, without unduly causing the tongues of gossips to wag. Clifford had no leaning towards asceticism, no inclination to deny

himself pleasurable hours ; and Catherine took his courtship lightly. This it was which specially intensified her attraction for Clifford. There was strength enough in her passion to make it real, and at times enthralling ; yet there was in her manner no foretaste of future regrets and reproaches. This makes the power of many women. The feeling that out of any passing relation claims arise which embitter the future—this in time makes men impatient, makes them often fling away, even with cruelty, a love which they feel may be a bondage.

Catherine was too shrewd to allow Clifford to have any sense of coming slavery. She felt victorious now, and her triumph seemed fully assured to her when she saw Nora's sudden gloom. She attributed the fixed sadness of Nora's eyes, the droop of her lips to grief for the loss of Clifford.

“ Poor fool ! ” thought Catherine, with a laugh, “ she has not the spirit to fight for her lover, but she mourns him in a sentimental, young ladyish way.”

It was after Clifford's visits to The Dell, after Catherine had been singing to him, laughing with him, caressing him, that she suddenly



assumed a gentler manner with Nora, which much surprised the latter.

These were Catherine's moments of conscious virtue. She felt she was kind and good to be gentle to her hateful step-sister, felt that she was quite as magnanimous as others, and far less pretentious, if only people did not thwart her.

We all have moments of conscious virtue, which are infinitely soothing and satisfactory.

A check came in Catherine's amiability before long. Clifford, being by no means an actor, allowed Catherine to perceive, after his scene with Nora, that he was preoccupied. He was not in the mood for Catherine, he avoided her, made excuses for not meeting her—lame excuses—for he did not think that Catherine could be deeply wounded by any change in him, did not estimate her character rightly—truly he did not try to estimate it at all.

It flashed into Catherine's mind that Clifford was tricking her, and this she had no idea of permitting. She was resolved to find the cause of Clifford's coldness and absent-mindedness. Seeing that he excused himself from coming to The Dell, Catherine quickly decided

that she would go on board the *Sunlight*, without warning Clifford, and would learn the truth. Perhaps Nora was working upon his feelings by sighs and tears ; perhaps they were both tricking her. Under any circumstances, once on board the *Sunlight* she could probably learn something. She would not place herself in an awkward or a ridiculous position by this visit ; she would laugh, and by her treatment of the scene, whatever it might prove to be, make the position of others more uncomfortable than her own.

Clifford had dined on board the cutter, and was sitting alone, smoking and sometimes drinking, when Catherine was rowing out to the *Sunlight*. Nora's words had upset him strangely. They were inexplicable to him. He had not seen Nora since that evening on the cliffs, but he had not ceased to think of her.

The complications of human feeling began to strike Clifford in a way they had never done before ; but he had not a contemplative or philosophical nature, and could never work out any clear result from a long process of thought, therefore his reflections left him quite

as puzzled as ever. He thought it probable that Nora had been distressed at Evelyn's death; but knowing nothing of Nora's interview with Allan, guessing nothing of her love for him, her probable unhappiness at Evelyn's untimely death seemed in no way to account to Clifford for her extraordinary proposal to him. At times he felt that only a nature vitiated by contact with evil could have coolly spoken the words which Nora had spoken; then he remembered her pure, fearless eyes, her simplicity, her nobility of expression, and straightway all evil thoughts of her vanished from his mind. At times he clung to the idea that her brain might be affected, at times he shuddered at the thought.

This constant disquietude and distress of mind was a new sensation to Clifford, and rather an unbearable one.

Sitting alone this evening, and having thought and thought about Nora till he was weary, Clifford took the not unusual course of soothing his trouble by drinking freely. He was not drunk, but he was certainly not unaffected by wine when Catherine walked into the saloon.

He looked at her with astonishment for a moment, and gave her no glad greeting, for he did not want to see her, felt bored by her presence. He was polite, however, and gave her a chair, with a smile.

“ You did not expect me,” she said, touching his head with her hand. “ The night was fine, I was in the mood to see you, so I came. Why did you not come to me yesterday ? ” she added.

“ I’m not good company,” he answered, “ that’s the truth ; and you are much too sensible a woman to wish a man to go and see you when he is down on his luck.”

“ Why are you down on your luck ? Won’t you tell me ? ”

She gave him a loving glance, and rested her hand on his shoulder ; but she knew, as she looked in his eyes, that he was cold and dead to her, that there was something in his mind which resisted her power, which had a stronger influence than her blandishments.

“ No ; what’s the good ? I’m worried, that’s all. By the way, I think I’ll manage to sail a little sooner than I intended. I fancy we’ll weigh anchor this day week.”

Catherine's eyes flashed ; but they were turned away from Clifford ; he did not see their expression.

“ You are glad to leave me ? ” she said with a smile.

“ No, I'm not ; I'm not so ungrateful ; but things don't go very deep with me. I've always said so. I like pleasure and laughter, and when I am worried, I like to work the worry off. I'll come back as jolly as a sand-boy.”

“ Something has gone deep to upset you so,” she said quickly. “ You don't trust me ; you never tell me anything.” Seeing a shadow of impatience in his face, she added quickly, “ Well, no matter ; I know all your secrets.”

Then she laughed, and her laugh sounded so reckless that Clifford liked her better. He was not in the mood for sentiment ; the wine began to tell on his spirits.

“ That's the way to take things,” he said, giving her a glance of admiration, and putting his arm round her waist.

But Catherine was not inclined now to reply to Clifford's passing affection. She felt enraged at the unknown power which made him resist her influence.

“I must go,” she said. “Good-night.”

He made a slight effort to detain her, a very slight effort. She rose, and they both went to the door of the saloon.

Catherine had not discovered anything. She had only been confirmed in her belief that there was some cause for the change in Clifford. She thought Nora was the cause, but she had not proved it. Suddenly she turned towards him.

“Guy! Guy!” she said eagerly, passionately, “will you take me away with you in the *Sunlight*? Will you save me from marrying Armfield? Will you let me be with you always?”

He looked at her with a smile. It seemed to him he was in luck regarding offers from women! Wine had made him gay, but with a bitter gaiety.

“Always!” he said, and laughed. “We should be so tired of one another; besides, no petticoat sails in the *Sunlight*, it’s against rules. We can have a very jolly time together now and then, dear; but always—always—we could not think of it!”

As he said this, he kissed her lightly.

She could have struck him, she could have

stabbed him at that moment, but she only laughed.

“I said it to try you,” she answered. “You don’t think I meant it! How sea-sick I should be; and how I should hate you. Love should be kept for firm land and fine weather. What day do you start? This day week?”

Clifford nodded.

“Well, I’ll see you again before that.”

“Won’t you kiss me?” asked Clifford, feeling puzzled, partly from wine, partly from Catherine’s manner.

“No,” she said, “not to-night; you smell of brandy, ugh!”

Then she ran on deck, laughing as she went, and was in her boat in a few minutes.

Our words and acts have manifold influences, not only on the people meant by us to be affected by them, but, unluckily, in other quarters.

Armfield saw Catherine returning to The Dell that night. He did not speak to her; she did not see him; but his jealousy was roused. Being engaged to him, Catherine was prospectively his property, and he swore he would not have her play any pranks.

The next day, therefore, Armfield came to give Catherine his views on the matter. His views were always pretty strongly expressed, and Catherine was not at all in the mood to receive them. She had been interested all day in the congenial occupation of spying Nora, and thus far she had been successful. She had learned that Nora had been at Wreck Cottage all day, and that, for some hours at least, Clifford had also been there. Report said that old Thornton was very ill, and this might account for Clifford's lengthy visit ; but Catherine thought there was another reason for his presence at Wreck Cottage. She had sought diligently for the cause of the change in Clifford, and could only attribute it to Nora. She had watched Nora return to The Dell, and, after a little while, leave the house hurriedly, carrying a parcel. Unseen, Catherine had studied Nora's face, and she saw that the sadness of her expression had changed to excitement, that she had a colour, that her eyes shone brightly. Clifford was at Wreck Cottage!

Catherine walked to and fro in impotent rage. It was in this mood that Armfield found her. She was impatient with him ; he



bored her. She forgot to be diplomatic, and a stormy scene ensued.

Ah, yes, she had come home late last night; why should she not? He was not yet her lord and master.

Then Armfield swore a coarse oath, and said that she did not go out at that hour for nothing, and he would soon find out whom she went to meet!

His rage amused Catherine. She began to tolerate his presence. She felt sure of him, and could laugh at his annoyance; with Clifford it was very different.

“If you were kinder to me, if you did not keep me at arm’s length,” he said fiercely, “I’d not suspect you; but you are so confoundedly cool that there’s sure to be some other fellow you’re sweet on, and if there is, by Jove, he’ll pay for it!”

Catherine laughed.

“Quite right,” she said; “but he only exists in your imagination, Trevor; and I’m dreadfully bored by your jealousy.”

Armfield was no match for Catherine. He could not bandy words with her and wither her by severity of speech; that was not his

style, and he hated being the subject of ridicule ; so, after a few savage and rather pointless observations, he left her, slamming the door after him with undignified rage, and Catherine, once more alone, consoled herself by singing her wildest songs for some hours.

Armfield walked away determined to avenge himself on Clifford.

Oh yes, he knew all about it. Catherine had promised to help in bringing Clifford to justice, and she had only helped to shield him. It would be easy to find out how matters stood as soon as Clifford was arrested. Catherine was sure to betray herself then, and if he, Armfield, were wrong in his suspicions, it would do no harm to have punished a damned smuggler, an upstart who tried to give himself the airs of a gentleman and to mix with a class which he did not belong to !

As Armfield walked slowly homewards, he reflected that he had laid his plans well. He had found out a good deal without Catherine's assistance ; and just as this insolent ruffian, Clifford, was about to sail for France, there would be an unexpected change in his programme.

## CHAPTER IX.

### A TRAGIC NIGHT.

OLD Jos was slipping away from life. It was plain enough to be seen, though there were days when he seemed to get back some of his old fire and strength, days when he sat in his chair by the chimney and talked with his wonted vigour. He had spoken no word to Nora about the death of Evelyn Holt, but he had linked together many little incidents, many little memories, and he knew full well why Nora's face was grave, and her heart heavy.

Everything now tended to madden Catherine, to increase her thirst for revenge, to fill her with a desire to strike some blow at those who had injured her. Clifford had left her starving for his presence, had pleaded constant occupation as a reason for not coming to The Dell,

and yet was often at Wreck Cottage, where he saw Nora day after day.

Oh, for some means of making Nora's life wretched! Catherine felt assured some means would come. But while waiting for the attainment of her chief aim—the destruction of Nora's dream of love—Catherine neglected no opportunity of embittering her daily life. Having heard of Evelyn's death she taunted Nora with it, and was pleased with the result. Judging from her own way of viewing things, Catherine scarcely hoped that Nora could be deeply affected by the death of a girl whose life was no special gain to her; Catherine, therefore, was surprised and delighted when she saw that her words had struck on a tender point.

Nora flushed painfully. She was silent for a little while, then lifted her head bravely, feeling in her generous soul that she must vindicate Evelyn, even to Catherine.

“It is not kind,” she said, “but it is perfectly just to taunt me with Evelyn's death. I fear I may have hastened it by making her unhappy. I thought she was false to Allan, and I said so, but I was wrong. She was a

little careless and foolish, perhaps, but quite true to him, and I misunderstood and injured her. All my life long I must repent, though it's no good to repent, of having unwittingly spoken a cruel lie. I wish every one to know that I slandered Evelyn. It is only common justice to her memory; so the more you tell people about it the better."

"You good people," said Catherine, with a laugh, "are always too free with your tongue. You speak from high principle, I suppose. I would not worry my head about the poor little fool, if I were you. No amount of repentance can bring her back now you've killed her."

When Catherine pondered over this, she was glad, exceeding glad, that some bitterness had already entered into Nora's life, and her rejoicing was increased by the thought that by a word she could end Nora's self-torture and prove Evelyn's treachery. That word should never come.

The day for Clifford's departure approached, and no tender word came from him. He seemed to have forgotten the love of the past few weeks, to count it as nothing. If gradu-

ally his passion for Catherine had died out, perhaps she would have let him go free ; but she was no meek fool, she reflected, to allow her heart to be thus swiftly taken up and cast aside. She, like Armfield, laid her plans, but in the sentence she had mentally pronounced against Clifford there was one saving clause, if her love could yet touch his heart and re-awaken his passion.

So, swiftly the days went by ; too swiftly for Nora, who was watching the flickering life of her old friend Thornton ; too swiftly for Catherine, who was dreading the sailing of the *Sunlight* and the failure of her schemes.

The eve of Clifford's departure came. Catherine was alone in her room at The Dell. There was a wild raging in her heart, which made her meet for compassing her ends at any cost. She had a right to know the truth, and she would know it. She pushed back the hair from her brow, which ached to-night, and she looked at herself.

No, she was not lovely. She had often told herself so ; but she saw the beauty in her eyes—a devilish beauty, perhaps, but still, they could thrill men with their power ; they

even startled her as they glowed in the dim light.

The world was full of people who had happiness and love ; why should not she ? If she were to lean out of the window now and look down the road to the village, she might see girls and men pass, leaning towards one another with bent heads, laughing, talking, holding hands with passionate pleasure. Why should she be alone here, neglected, mocked ?

She dwelt on the last thought bitterly.

All those around her were trying to win enjoyment for themselves ; they were not scrupulous as to the means they used. Why should she be ? She had been regardful of appearances, and had never drawn men into any complication from which it was difficult to free themselves. Why should she have all the bitter disappointment, and they take their pleasure and go scathless ? It was time this sort of thing should end. What fools men were ! Good Heavens ! the women they loved ! Doll-faced girls like Evelyn Holt, whose deceit and lies they could not detect, because they looked pretty and graceful, and held up their faces in an innocent way to be kissed !

Catherine laughed out loud, for her mind was wrought to a frenzy, and the laugh sounded harsh and weird, mingling with the wail of the wind through the lattice.

Women like Nora, too, were loved. Why? Because they affected to be virtuous, and held back from their lovers. Men were like kittens: the more a toy was held out of their reach, the more they sprang at it. Attainment was always completion, and completion was always the ending.

Catherine almost spoke the words. Mere silent thought did not give enough vent to the wildness of her feelings. Sometimes her hands were clenched together, sometimes flung out defiantly, and yet she was unconscious of any movement, only felt some power within her breast gradually urging her to some act from which she could not draw back.

Nora held her head up so proudly, and despised appearances, but no doubt she had her private consolations. Well, if she so despised appearances, it would be no humiliation to her for all the world to know her secret. She, Catherine, would humble her to the dust if she could. How little Nora knew



that a few words could lift from her the curse of Evelyn's death, but these words should never be spoken—never. Nora had thwarted her in everything, been the favourite of their father, and taken all his love, had brought discredit on their name by her low origin and low tastes, and now, now Nora had perhaps stepped in between her and happiness, had perhaps enslaved Clifford—this man whom she, Catherine, loved with a savage, unconquerable passion. Of course, Nora did not love him—a cold-blooded woman, who was scornful of the world's opinion, because there was no passion in her to hide, no feeling to be kept sacred. Christian charity—forgiveness—bah! It was all a farce, which society demanded for its amusement! She was as willing as any one to keep up the farce. She had never been unmindful of society's feelings, and did not mean to be now; but she would be revenged. All men sought revenge in different ways; some by sympathetic back-biting and slandering, some by outstripping their rivals and snatching the prize by strength or cunning. Did any one ever freely give up something he valued, because he thought his neighbour de-

served in more ! Never. How should she avenge herself !

Catherine opened the window and looked out, as if demanding an answer from the night. A cold night, wild and stormy, with hurrying clouds and angry sounds.

There was a dinner to-night at the Sea Gull, and Clifford was there. To-morrow he would sail. Was he to go away, leaving her to torture herself with suspicion while Nora exulted ? No ; to-night must end things. She would hold Guy in her power, or wring the truth from him somehow. Wine excited him ; and he was apt to be rash and weak in the hands of a woman. Poor Guy !

She smiled half tenderly.

Surely she could bend him to her will ; he could not resist her love ; she could not fail of her aim. She was not beautiful, but she could make him feel her fascination, for she loved him. If he would but love her for a year, for six months, as he had loved her in the past few weeks !

Catherine leaned back in her armchair now, her eyes half closed, her lips parted slightly, a sort of voluptuous entrancement on her

whole face and figure. She did not yield to this dream for long. Time was passing.

If she could but see Guy alone after he left the Sea Gull! She *must* do so. If, in the fever and temptation of the hour, with her words of love in his ear, and her passionate glance resting on him, his heart was touched, and he uttered vows of attachment, she could hold him to them, for he was fanciful in his notions of honour. Poor Guy! But if he was firm, and admitted his love for Nora—she would force the truth from him—then, then, she would know what to do.

Catherine was quite relentless; anything like mercy was impossible to her nature.

It was getting late now. Action must result from her thoughts, to submit to fate was impossible.

Catherine smiled at the faint probability of this night passing in weak acquiescence. She never planned that which she feared to carry through.

Ten o'clock. There was time to dress and go to the village, there to watch for the occasion which chance and her own wit could bring. She trusted most strongly to the latter.

She did not consider the probable effect of her white, straight-tufted arms. She dressed slowly and carefully, neglecting no touch that made her look well. She needed not any aid to beautify the flush on her cheek, or increase the brilliancy of her eyes. It was not alone her semi-savage love for Clifford which urged her to some mad deed to-night; it was her determination not to be deceived, nor be at the mercy of man or woman; it was the longing to pay in coin that would ruin, the debt of hatred she owed to Nora. Her hands trembled from feverish excitement. She arranged and re-arranged her dress, she put flowers in her hair, then twisted a lace scarf round her head and neck. She had, to-night, a dangerous, reckless beauty, strange and devilish. She walked downstairs dressed thus, forgetting, till she reached the hall door, that she could not go to the village in this attire. As her hand was on the latch she remembered. She must get a large shawl or something. She was about to call the maid, but she saw that there was no light downstairs, and concluded that the servants were in bed. On

a chair in the hall Catherine perceived some dark object. She took it up. It was a long, blue cloth cloak of peculiar make, with a hood to it, which Nora constantly wore. It was the very thing Catherine required. She drew the lace scarf over her face, pulled the hood of the cloak over her head, and went out.

It was a wild night and dark, no moon, no stars to be seen, great black clouds drifting along, and leaving now and then a stretch of grey, dull sky, scarcely less dark than the clouds. The boughs of the trees, which hung across the road, were tossed by the wind, and looked weird in the dimness.

They did not frighten Catherine. She laughed, and thought scornfully that there was not anything in heaven or earth that could make her afraid, not anything that could make her start or tremble. She walked as if on air; no, she scarcely walked, she seemed borne forward by the force of mental excitement, and was unconscious of bodily action.

She came to the village. Here and there a solitary light burned, but most of the cottages were in darkness. All was very still and peaceful, save for the roar of the sea, till

Catherine came close to the Sea Gull, and then she heard voices and much laughter.

The parlour window was towards the water, so that, from the side of the house on which Catherine had approached, she could not look into the room. She had to use caution now; but she knew that could she but once slip round the angle of the house near her, there was a corner close to the parlour window, where the little inn took a whimsical turn in its construction, and where she could stand in deep shadow and see everything that passed within.

Catherine watched till the gale blew its loudest, and the blackest clouds darkened the air, then with a swift rush gained her hiding place. She was not nervous, her heart did not beat one whit faster; she only smiled triumphantly. She could see into the inn parlour now, for the shutters were not closed, and the lights showed every face clearly.

Clifford was sitting so that when he raised his head it almost seemed to Catherine that he was looking at her. Next to him was Allan Moore, his face scornful and bitter in expression, as it always was now. There was

a din of voices, though the party only numbered twelve. Every one seemed to talk at the same time.

“A song, Clifford,” said a handsome lad, who sat near Guy—“a song. We have had enough grave talk for a year. What with politics, the state of the poor, and the grievances of the miners, a hogshead of Burgundy would not save me from being sober!”

“I’m of your mind,” said Allan. “It’s too late for grave counsel, and not much use at any time.”

“This from you, my friend!” said Clifford. “Then, by George, sobriety has gone to the devil!”

Then, without further prelude, Guy burst forth into—

“The deil’s awa’ with the exciseman.”

His head was thrown back. He enjoyed his song, embellishing it with many nods and winks, and singing it without effort, for his voice was like his whole nature, sweet and full of vigour, and the melody rolled out into the noisy night, reaching Catherine, who stood, with her lips parted, in eager admiration of him.

There was applause and laughter when the song was ended. Squire Armfield leaned across the table and laughed loud, but he looked at Clifford insolently.

“A song of a tenderer sort next time,” he said. “I don’t sympathize with your delight in sending his majesty’s officers to the devil, though some of the guests undoubtedly do.”

He glanced round in a way which he meant to be very severe.

“Commend me to a man of the squire’s type for being hateful when in liquor,” thought Clifford.

Allan noticed at once the dogged determination to pick a quarrel, which was in Armfield’s expression. Not that Allan suspected Armfield of wishing to fight for any special cause, but his importance had gradually swelled so immeasurably that he evidently desired to fling it in the face of every one. Topsy quarrels were very repugnant to Allan, and he knew that they sometimes grew to a ridiculous seriousness, so he chimed in with Armfield—

“The songs of love before all. I feel in a melting mood.” His lip curled as he spoke.



“Let the youngest begin, he’ll have the most enthusiasm.”

“Let us toast the women we admire,” said a weakly youth, a guest of Armfield’s.

His clothes were cut with much elegance, and he bore in the twist of his moustache, in the whiteness of his hand, in his graceful lounge at table, the unmistakable impress of having lived in fashionable society, and of being thoroughly familiar with the customs thereof.

All raised their glasses, and many a woman’s name was toasted with enthusiasm.

“I hear no woman’s name on your lips,” said Armfield to Clifford. “Is your love and your trade equally mysterious?”

Clifford’s eyes flashed with all their scorn and fire, as he returned the squire’s insolent stare.

“I win so much in both,” he answered, with a laugh, “that I never boast. My success might make other men jealous.”

“Women sometimes betray,” answered Armfield, “and make your discretion valueless.”

Allan interposed.

“Of women, as of the dead, we should speak nothing but good.”

“Bravo! Chivalrous defender of the fair sex,” said Armfield sneeringly.

Allan saw the gathering storm in Clifford’s face. At all times, quick in temper, he could be roused to uncontrollable wrath by a man of Armfield’s cold insolence.

“It is only a contemptible scoundrel who makes a woman play the spy for him.”

Clifford had understood Armfield’s allusion in the way the latter had meant it to be understood.

“Come, gentlemen,” said Allan quickly, his pale face flushing and gaining strength and resolution in its expression, as it always did in moments of excitement, “we have met for good fellowship, and not for hot words, and I, for one, will leave the table if there is to be useless anger between the guests.”

“And I will follow you,” said the handsome lad, “and if it be not soon, Moore, by heavens! I’ll have to be carried!”

As he spoke, he raised his hand unsteadily, and drank another bumper of Burgundy.

“Well said, Moore,” Armfield observed slowly. “By Jove! Clifford and I can fight it out alone; it’s the simplest way, and does not hurt others.”

He looked at Clifford, not at Moore, as he said this, fixing his eyes on him with the same insolent stare.

“True,” said Guy, “it’s more reasonable and more satisfactory.”

After this, those of the company who were not too drunk to be past intelligent perception, knew that some sort of challenge had been given and accepted. Allan knew it, and wished to God that the two men had not met to-night. Catherine knew it. She had heard their words, for the window was a little open, and the voices of the men rang out clear in their anger. She loathed Armfield at that moment for making Clifford think she had betrayed him. Her task would be hard to-night, if Guy had learned to think of her as a spy. Yet she would wring the truth from him. If he did not love Nora, she could forgive him; but if he loved Nora—well, she would soon know.

Catherine scarcely heard what was said during the next half-hour. There were songs sung and stories told, sometimes coarse and humorous, but oftener coarse without being humorous; but in most of the men the fine-

ness of intellectual, as of bodily, taste, had by this time utterly faded away, and all jokes were alike hailed with delight.

At last the party broke up or broke down. The last term might be considered the most appropriate, as some five or six of the guests assumed reclining or fallen positions, and became delightfully oblivious of life's troubles, and some few straggled off and staggered home.

Armfield alone still sat at the table and drank.

Allan put his arm through Guy's and led him away. Clifford was in a most cheerful state, singing snatches of "The deil's awa'," and occasionally stopping to explain to Allan, in an awe-struck whisper, that Armfield was a damned scoundrel. Allan walked with him some little way, and then left him. He saw that Guy could be trusted alone now, and thought he was safely out of the reach of further mischief. He hoped, too, that as the *Sunlight* was to sail on the morrow, there would be no evil result from the unlucky quarrel with Armfield.

Clifford stood for a minute or two, and

watched Allan out of sight, then turned to the right, under the trees, by the path to the cliff. It was not at all clear to him what he meant to do. Sometimes he sang, sometimes he stood still and talked ; but there was a sort of under-current of sobriety in him, and this was a dull pain associated with the unceasing thought of Nora. He never looked back, or he would have noticed a woman following him, stopping when he stopped, drawing gradually nearer and nearer to him. At last he was made conscious of her presence, for she laid her hand on his arm, and said falteringly—

“ Guy.”

For one moment Catherine felt a woman's timidity ; she kept her head turned away from him, and her heart beat fast.

Clifford looked at her in puzzled wonder for an instant, touched her cloak, and whispered excitedly—

“ Nora ! you here ! Why are you here ? ”

It was not much to say, but the tenderness of tone had a world of meaning to Catherine ; it scorched up the last dewdrop of pity and womanly softness, the last blossom of hope, and left her heart burning with unsatisfied

passion, relentless in its love as in its hate. She muttered his name again, but this time in imitation of Nora's voice; and Clifford, blinded by wine and excitement, was deceived. The night, too, lent its aid to the deception. There was no moon, no stars, and they could scarcely see their way under the waving trees, which the wind tossed and rocked angrily as it passed.

Then Clifford spoke words which, in his maddest moments, he had never spoken to Nora, words which would never have been spoken in soberness; but his blood was wild from wine, and some of the lawlessness of the night was in his veins. He tried to put his arms round Catherine's neck, and turn her head towards him, but she resisted. Then he caught her hand and kissed it.

"Oh, my love, my heart's darling," he said madly. "Have you come to say again what you said up here on the cliff that day? I'll take you at your word now, dearest. Do you know, that ever since that day I've cursed myself for a fool? Why did I scold you, instead of taking you in my arms and blessing you? The love would have come after a

while, Nora. Surely it would have passed from my heart to yours, when I made you mine."

All this was spoken in a low voice rapidly, almost incoherently, with his head bent down towards Catherine.

She listened and shivered at his words. She had gained the knowledge she sought.

These words which he thought he was whispering to Nora, these words which hurt her and maddened her, ah! they should never be spoken to Nora—never. A cruel smile was on Catherine's lips as she thought she would use her talent for mimicry. She could not quite render her voice sweet and mellow in tone like Nora's, but the measure and accent she could imitate to perfection, and she trusted to Clifford's excitement to complete the deception.

"No, Guy," she said gently, "for that, it is too late."

They were walking on together as she spoke.

"What do you mean?" he said. "Why, too late?"

He stopped walking; but she moved on, and after a moment he followed her.

“Because,” she said in a whisper, “another has accepted what you refused.”

There was a silence, even Catherine felt a moment's fear. Clifford laughed.

“Indeed!” he said, in a scornful, reckless tone, and then he laughed again. “I trust the object of your second choice felt proud and honoured. Did you mention that you had already offered yourself to me and been rejected? *I* like to find a lady somewhat different in mind and manner from a certain class I sometimes meet; but perhaps he, this man you have so honoured, finds it less trouble to deal with a nature such as every one is familiar with.”

Clifford had begun to speak in a low tone, but his voice rose as he went on, and rang bitterly and cruelly at the close. Catherine shrank away from him a little.

They had come out from the wood now, and were at the cliff's edge. Catherine said no word, and kept her head turned away from Clifford. She was uncertain as yet of the ending, uncertain how she could get away without recognition, for every minute made the risk of discovery greater. The sky might



clear, and in a stronger light her face would be seen, or the fumes of wine might pass off and Guy, being less excited, could not fail to recognize her. She thought of all this, but felt no fear. Even as a tyrant is relentless, though he knows a whole nation is ready to rise against him, the triumph of his cruelty is soul absorbing.

“I thought you a pure, sweet, exquisite woman. I thought the world did not hold such another. Shall I tell you now what I think? You have the face and manners of a gentlewoman, and the soul of a harlot!”

He hissed out the words into Catherine's ear.

They had come out from under the trees now, and were walking at the cliff's edge.

“They are coarse words,” he went on, “and you think me a brute for speaking them; but what do I care? Coarse deeds are worse. For me all women henceforth are alike, to be enjoyed, not respected; for I swear to God that, if a woman can look like you and have so foul a soul, all women must be liars!”

He seized her roughly at the last words, and would have turned her face towards him, as if to confirm, by gazing on her, the contradiction

of what she seemed and what she was. The next moment Clifford would have discovered his error, but an interruption came and turned his attention away from her.

All along up the path they had been watched and followed by Armfield. Sitting in the inn parlour after the others had gone, he had seen Catherine slip from her post of observation, and had instantly recognized her. He was not excited by drinking, he was watchful and sullen, so he followed Catherine steadily and doggedly, not taking much pains to conceal that he was tracking her. She, being entirely absorbed by her desire to speak to Guy, was unaware of Armfield's pursuit. The latter could not understand the scene at all; he was not near enough to hear their words, but thought it probable that Clifford was reproaching Catherine with having betrayed him to her betrothed.

When they halted at the cliff's edge, and Clifford, with violent speech and rough gestures, seized Catherine's arm, Armfield strode up to them.

"Come, sir, no rough usage!" growled he, in a brutal tone.

He was taking high ground, he was defending a woman from violence ; whatever came of this quarrel, he would be in the right.

Clifford loosed Catherine, and faced Armfield.

Catherine realized the position at once, knew that Trevor recognized her, and that, in one minute more, her deception and the lies she had told would be exposed. To silence Armfield was the one course for her.

Good God ! how swiftly deeds are done which eternity cannot undo !

Instantly, Catherine thrust herself between the two men, turning her back to Guy, and hoping, by a whispered word, to make Armfield dumb. But they were at the cliff's edge, and the night was dark. The swift movement, unexpected by both, made Armfield take a hasty step backwards. He tripped over a loose stone, clutched vaguely at something in the empty air, and fell over the cliff, with a curse on his lips, into the roaring waters below them.

A wild scream from Catherine went up into the night, as she saw what she had done. Clifford was sobered at once, and, with a

sailor's swift action, born from a life of perpetual adventure, he let himself down over the cliff, and began to descend rapidly. He knew every inch of the rocky wall, and could go up and down the face of it, even in the dark. As he descended, he shouted to Catherine, being still deceived about her—

“For God's sake, Nora, run for help.”

But she stood watching him, then stooped over the cliff, with a fascinated gaze, till his form was lost in the darkness.

Go for help! Why should she go for help? Clifford was safe enough, he could swim; and, even if he were lost with Trevor, what did it matter? It was not her doing; they would only meet the fate they deserved! They had both lied. She had done with them both.

She knelt down, and leaned over the cliff. The moon came out at last and shone on her face, which looked ghastly. She tossed the hood of her cloak off her head, she tossed the lace scarf back, and panted with excitement.

The faint light of the moon shone on the waters below. Catherine saw, or fancied she saw, a dark object moving in the white foam

of the raging waters. There was no sound but that of the winds and waters.

Was it all a delusion that, a few minutes ago, two men had stood here, and now had vanished suddenly, perhaps had gone into the great void for ever ?

Catherine felt chained to the spot, as if no power could lift her from her kneeling posture.

How gloriously fate had swept from her path the two men who had hurt her, and had left the woman she hated to suffer slowly before her eyes, so that her revenge might be complete !

Still Catherine bent over the rocks, and her face had a hideous expression of gloating. Crouching there, she seemed scarcely human.

By-and-by, as she gazed, the waters seemed to mount up towards her. They seemed to claim her too, and she felt irresistibly drawn to that great devouring sea. But they were down there, her victims, and, with a sudden spring, she wrenched herself away and fled, drawing her hood over her head as she ran, and never pausing once till she stood at the door of The Dell. Still the wind whistled and waved the branches of the great trees ; and

still all seemed silent in the house. She went in ; she threw the cloak on the chair where it had lain before ; she went to her room softly. She folded her evening dress and put it away lay down and slept a dreamless sleep till morning.

## CHAPTER X.

### PEACE, TO THE QUIET DEAD.

ABOUT an hour after Catherine returned to The Dell, Nora came in. For her, too, this night had been full of emotion, though of a somewhat different kind. By Nora, the night had been passed at Wreck Cottage.

When the usual hour came for Nora to go home, old Jos looked at her for awhile with a yearning expression in his wonderful old eyes. At length he said softly—

“Stay a bit, lass, the trip is near ended.”

“I am not going away,” she answered quietly.

“I feel in the mind to talk about you to-night, and though you mayn’t like it, I’ll do it all the same.”

He paused awhile, for his strength was going. He looked at her for a few minutes.

“Well,” he went on, “I don’t think much of my success. I’ve taught you like a boy, and you have no woman’s whining about you, but you are not a success. You’ve worked, you’ve done your share of labour so far, but I had best have let you alone, lass, for you are wearying for the end, I see it in your wistful eyes. You are a brave woman and a good one, and though I wanted to make you strong and fearless like a man, the heart of you is as soft, as tender as ever was woman’s, thank God.”

He feebly stroked Nora’s hand, which lay on his bed. After a few minutes, while Nora’s tears fell slowly, he spoke again.

“You’ll miss the old man—won’t you? But you’ll live here, the cottage is yours, child. And don’t you waste your powers and waste your life in regret. Regret is a living death. What’s done, is done. Lessen the harm if you can, and if you can’t, you must hold your head up all the same. Is there anything else?” he added.

Nora looked at him eagerly, there was a question in her eyes.

“Well, child, what is it?” he asked.



“Are you going away? Is it really true?”

“Yes.”

“What do you think of it all, now that it is so near? I want to know. Looking back and looking forward, what do you think, Jos?”

A smile came on his lips, in his eyes, over his whole face, then he spoke.

“I don’t know much about it, lass, and I don’t want to, it’s time enough. I might have been better and wiser, but I’ve not been cruel or idle, and the rest He’ll not make much count of. That’s what I think of the past; and as to the future, it don’t puzzle me a bit. He’ll see to it, and I don’t doubt but old Jos will get fairly treated. And I’ve a kind of notion, lass”—here his eyes sparkled—“that what I’ve dreamt of and tried for, in a clumsy way, and never reached to *here*, I’ll understand *there*. Who knows? And if not, and I’ve to work on, I can do it; and if not, and this is the end of all, well, old Jos is ready. I can trust God Almighty, for, depend on it, He knows a deal more than I do.”

His voice sank very much towards the close, but Nora was leaning towards him and could

hear every word. She did not think the end very near, for he had been ill for a long time now, and she thought the fluttering life might be watched and kept within him for weeks yet ; but something in his expression to-night filled her with a deeper sense of loneliness than she had ever known. Perhaps it was the sound of the wild wind, which made her more than usually desolate. She had long known that she must face life some day without her old friend, that the one gleam of brightness must die out ; and yet for her the end of life might be a long way off.

Nora mended the fire and brought some soup for Thornton, but he would not take it. Quite still was old Jos for full an hour, and Nora thought he slept. Suddenly he moved restlessly, and began to talk.

“You are not going to sea, my boy ; oh no,” he said quickly, while his cheeks flushed and his eyes grew wild. “What does it matter about her—only a woman, a heartless woman ? They are all alike. You won’t leave me ?”

He stretched his arms out, he held Nora by the shoulders. She saw that he was delirious, and tried to soothe him.

“I won’t leave you,” she said gently, “I’ll take care of you.”

He looked at her for a few minutes, then took his hands from her shoulders and began to sob. They were low, weak sobs, which almost stopped his faint breath. Suddenly he said—

“Jos, you’re an old fool.”

As he spoke he looked up, and his eyes rested on Nora with an expression of surprise and dislike.

“You killed my boy,” he said quickly—  
“you killed my boy; I tell you, you did. I hate the whole crew of you; and no woman shall ever darken my doors.”

“I am Nora. Don’t you know me?” she said.

She could not bear him to think that she had hurt him.

“Nora—Nora—Nora,” he repeated. “Ah, she was good, bright, and clever, like my boy; but they told lies and they killed her. She did not tell me, but I saw that they had killed her; she is dead, poor child!”

He gave a long sigh, sank back, and was quiet for a time, then started up again.

“I must go now,” he said quickly. “Don’t

you hear the storm ! wind in from the nor'-west'ard, and the ship making straight for the rocks !”

He sat up and struggled to get out of bed, but had not the strength.

A long, wild scream was heard above the wind. Jos bent forward. Nora trembled, and the scene grew weird and ghostly. What was this woman's cry ?

“ Ah,” Jos said, “ don't you hear ? Give me my sou'wester, there—it's on the nail. Let me go. I must do what I can.”

Nora got up and brought the sou'wester, but his thoughts had wandered off again.

“ That was a woman's shriek. Perhaps she repents now that she sees him cold on the sands ; perhaps she's sorry, but it's too late. They're always sorry when it's too late—those women.”

He began to move his hands restlessly, and his eyes were very distant in their gaze. He muttered a few words, and Nora caught Clifford's name. Then, very low, but quite distinctly, old Jos said—

“ Lay me down so. After all, there's nothing like the hammock.”

These were his last words.

Life lingered a little, only to make Nora watch and hope for another glance of recognition. Old Jos did not struggle in the grasp of death, but gently yielded, and so death took him kindly.

For some time Nora knelt by his bedside. What kind of prayer went up from that sad heart? Only a cry for rest like this.

How could she ask it? He had done his task bravely; she had but filled the life of another with bitterness. There could be no rest for her.

Nora rose, closed Thornton's eyes, and kissed his face, then went out into the night. She felt nearer to her old friend here in the storm than there in the cottage, where he dwelt no longer. The night was very dark, and the waves beat with their old relentless fury against the resisting rocks.

All nature seemed working to some end; she alone seemed helpless. Was there nothing to be done? Did every one walk blindly, and mete out death and pain to those they loved? Perhaps that was it. God was cruel, and made His creatures the instruments of His

cruelty! He availed Himself of their ignorance, of their mistakes, and bound them ever after to the service of fate!

Nora stood in the little garden motionless. It was very dark. Now and then she could see the flash from the lighthouse.

What was that wild cry she had heard? Was it from out the soul of the woman who had wrecked the life of Wilfrid Thornton? Was it uttered in dread of meeting the accusing spirit of his father? She had repented, perhaps, but could not undo. Of what avail was repentance? Nora thought of the remorse which was eating into her own soul. The evil she had done was not lessened.

Nora's grief for old Jos was not violent. A grief such as this was calm and gentle, compared to the gnawing regret and sorrow that was with her always now. Yet in the dark of the night she lifted her face to heaven, and wailed for her friend, the only one who loved her through good and evil, and she longed that for her, too, the end might come.

Then Nora drew her shawl more closely round her; her face assumed its usual veiled expression, and she turned towards home.

CHAPTER XI.

UNDER ARREST.

THE dawn rose and smiled ; smiled on Nora while she shivered and turned with shrinking from its brightness ; smiled on Catherine, who greeted it with wide-eyed eagerness, not knowing what it might bring, but fearless, in her cruelty, of any fate ; smiled on the still face of Jos Thornton, which bore yet the impress of simple bravery on its fixed features ; smiled on the dead form of Trevor Armfield, which lay on a deal table in the police station, removed thither from the sands, where the sea had cast him, as though, having wreaked its vengeance, it spurned his unsightly body. The slime of the water was on his hair and features, adding a last degradation to a face long before defiled by evil thought. The dawn smiled, too, on Guy Clifford, in a room which represented to

the popular mind at Cairn Cove law, authority, and protection. A gleam of morning light fell on his bright hair. His face was hidden on his arms, which rested on the table, as he lay in a feverish sleep.

All these men and women had, in the dark hours of the stormy night, been bound, living and dead, by remorseless fate to hurt and trample on each other, to darken the future, each for each.

Clifford woke at the smile of the morn, raised his head, and looked round.

Where was he? What horrible dreams he had had! Oh—— He remembered. He had helped the constable to carry up the body of Armfield, and it was there in the next room. They had advised him not to go home till daylight. He could go now.

Clifford rose, pushed his hair back, which had fallen over his brow, and walked to the door. He turned the handle; but found he could not open it. He looked puzzled for a moment; then laughed. He understood. It must be that he was under arrest. It was early yet, but faint, waking sounds could be heard—now and then the crowing of a



cock, the bleating of a sheep, the barking of a dog. Everything was waking with delight to life and feeling. For the first time, Clifford felt no gladness. His vigorous nature had always prevented him from having any wish to escape from existence; he had felt at his dreariest times that mere breath and motion were pleasure, and that life held always possibilities of enjoyment. Now it was different. The woman, whom in his honest worship he had placed above all evil, whom he revered as the representative to him of all goodness, was, by her own admission, no purer nor better than other women, whose worldliness and coarseness had hitherto failed to make him cynical, because of the one noble heart he had believed in.

Clifford scarcely gave a thought to Armfield, except a moment's sincere regret that hasty words had been spoken after dinner, which may have caused the latter to follow him, and thus have led to Armfield's death. Clifford scarcely gave a thought to the fact that he himself was evidently in custody, and that suspicion, of course, would rest on him. His thoughts were all with Nora.

He need not worry himself; she was not likely to be implicated in any investigation respecting the death of Armfield. She had not risked going for help last night. Last night! Was it only last night? She had thought it wiser to secure her own safety. How unlike Nora! She, who never shrank from the consequences of any act; she, Nora, to leave two men literally in the grasp of death without raising a finger to save them! Bah! Old Jos was right, after all. There is always a hidden spring in every woman, which, if by chance you touch, will reveal a narrow cowardice and self-cherishing which blights all life. Well, it did not matter; he had loved her, and did not want any harm to come to her. There was no one to say that she had been present last night, except himself, and he was not likely to speak. Perhaps she was mad, poor child! She had been strange of late. She was very lonely; no one to love her but old Jos, and he could not last long. Well, she had been faithful to the old man; that side of her character was entirely good. Why had Nora followed him up the cliff last night? What was the meaning of it? He

could not explain anything to himself. Who was the man Nora had chosen to give herself to? If the ruffian did not treat her well, by God, he should pay for it!

Clifford began to pace to and fro.

Who could it be? Surely not that wretch that lay dead in the next room! Yet what was the meaning of his fury, and her fear?

Clifford drew back from the thought. It seemed a degradation to Nora to associate her for a moment with Armfield.

Guy stood by the window. The morning mist was slowly vanishing. He had never felt bitter about life before. The air of early dawn, even the dawn of a cold winter's day, had always filled him with delight. A few hours had changed things. This confession of Nora's had cut her off from his love for ever. He wanted to see her at once, to hear again from her lips the same words, if they were true, to make sure that last night's scene had not been merely the nightmare of a drunken man.

He must see her. No; what was the good of it? It was all true enough. It had been no nightmare, that horrid fall, the sound which

came up through the night of the splash in the roaring waters below. It had been no nightmare, his fruitless struggle to save Armfield, and the sudden casting up of his body on the sands by the billows. And all that had passed before must have been real, too. Yet he wanted to see Nora, to entreat her to deny what she had said. If she would but swear that she had lied! He would plead with her, go on his knees to her, and implore as never woman had been implored. Oh! if she would but look at him with her fearless eyes, and say that it was a mad lie that she had spoken. Oh!

Clifford covered his eyes with his hand and sobbed. Her sweet body, the thought of which he had never dwelt on too long, lest an unhallowed thought might seem to taint it in his soul; her free, fearless spirit, which had soared so far out of the reach of men; her loving hands, her tender glances, which had only been for the sick and suffering; all, all, cast the feet of some sensual beast, who reckoned her as all other women!

Why should he see her? He could only speak coarse, cruel words to her. He did not

know what he had said to her last night. He had been wild and savage; and what was the good of it! A poor, pitiful, weak creature, who must "gang her own gait." It would be brutal of him to crush a woman like that. She might be remorseful, or, worse still, might show a cringing fear, and beg him not to implicate her in last night's story. How could he tell? Never again could he calculate on what any one would do, nor guess what baseness might be revealed in the hearts he most trusted. Allan? Well, there was no mistake about him. What would he think of all this? He would talk in his usual bitter vein, of course. He must not know about Nora.

Clifford laughed.

Bah! he would make a joke of it. You can always get fun out of things, if you try.

People were stirring about the house now. The armed force necessary for Armfield's and his detention would soon present itself, and perhaps it would consent to give him some breakfast! After all, if the authorities did not keep him alive, they could not possibly hang him!

Clifford began to whistle, "The De'il's awa'."

The key was turned in the lock, the door opened, and Allan was shown in.

“Hullo, old fellow! The top of the morning to you!” said Guy cheerily. “You look as if you had never been in bed in your life! This is a nice business, isn’t it?”

“What is the meaning of this, Guy?” Allan said quickly. “Give up jesting for once and tell me.”

“I did not kill Armfield; let me relieve your mind, old boy! He would have been too poor game for me.”

“How did it all happen? There are all sorts of rumours flying about.”

“After you left me last week—no, it was last night—I went up the cliff walk. I was, perhaps, in a slightly exalted state, consequent on the generous entertainment at the Sea Gull. Armfield, wishing, perhaps, to indulge in a little more friendly conversation such as we had at dinner, followed me—unluckily for him. We had a few words at the rock’s edge—by the way, the words were all his—he tripped and fell over. This is the story, Moore. I suppose the popular version will be, that I pitched him over to escape

the consequences of that challenge given at dinner.”

“How are you going to disprove the popular version of the story?”

“Ah, that’s the difficulty. The growth of scepticism in the present age is appalling! You can’t prove things to unbelieving minds. There are people now who refuse to believe in Jonah’s three days’ residence in the whale’s interior! After that, what hope is there for my statements?”

“Clifford, this may be more serious than you think. Good God! it makes me furious that even suspicion should rest on you! Give your attention to me. Was there no witness, no person nor circumstance which can support your statement?”

“The fact that I tried to fish out the poor devil, that I roused the constable and gave information at once, that I continued the search till at last an eddy of the sea cast Armfield up on the sands; all this corroborates my statement, I fancy.”

“It may help to prove that you did not deliberately murder him, but it does not prove at all that you did not strike him in anger and cause his fall.”

“No, neither does it. That’s the beauty of a logical mind ; it finds the weak points in a man’s defence. Suppose you exercise your ingenuity in finding the strong points, my friend.”

Moore knew that when Clifford persistently treated a grave subject lightly, it meant that he was concealing some special trouble in connection with it.

“There are no strong points about your case as *you* state it,” Allan said, with evident irritation ; “but probably, from some Quixotic notion, you are concealing some fact which would be in your favour, and make everything as clear as day.”

Allan looked at him fixedly.

“I never conceal anything which would benefit me if told. The Lord never made me such a fool !”

“Some one was present whom you don’t choose to implicate.”

The thought and the words were almost simultaneous. This possible explanation of Guy’s manner flashed into Allan’s mind unaccountably.

“Nothing of the kind, Moore,” Clifford said



quickly. "Don't make such an idiot of yourself. Why the devil should I hide anything which could help me out of this mess?" He spoke angrily, and his tone strengthened Allan's suspicions. "Oh, it will be all right," Clifford added carelessly. "They'll soon understand. There can only be a little tiresome inquiry. Let us change the subject. How is old Jos?"

"Have you not heard? He is dead, Guy!"

Clifford started.

"I thought he would have held out longer," he said quietly. "He must have died all alone. That is sad. I don't like to think of it."

He turned his head away as he spoke.

"Nora was with him, wasn't she?"

"No," Guy answered. Then, recollecting quickly, he added, "At least, it is not likely if old Jos died in the night."

Allan was silent. He had got a clue.

Presently Clifford said—

"I hope Nora was with him. If she saw that he was failing yesterday evening, I've no doubt she stayed on at the cottage. I'd like to see him. I am sure he looks fine in his

last sleep, poor old chap. His was a brave, true heart. He never failed any one, and that's a weighty bit of praise, mate."

There was silence for some minutes. Clifford walking slowly to and fro, with his hands in his pockets and his eyes fixed on the ground; Allan standing by the window, looking out. Presently Guy stopped opposite his friend.

"There will be a judicial inquiry. I may be set free, or I may not; the odds are against me. If I am detained, there will be much grubbing in dark corners for my past history, so that out of the strangest elements they may establish a probability that I pitched Armfield over the cliff. I don't go to church, ergo, I've a tendency to commit manslaughter. I am known to have a weakness for women, ergo, I look on men as my natural enemies, and have a tendency to destroy them. There will be no end to the things which will throw light on my ferocious character; besides, a sailor is always untrustworthy."

Allan did not appear to listen to him; he seemed to be working out something in his own mind.

"Wake up," Clifford said, laying his hand

on Moore's shoulder. "I want you to attend to me. One thing is clear—I can't sail to-day. Will you take a note for me to Smashing Jack?"

"Yes," Allan answered mechanically. He still seemed much absorbed by his thoughts.

Clifford wrote a few lines in pencil, folded the paper very small, and gave it to Allan.

"Give this into Jack's own hand, and explain to him that I am detained while the wise men of the county try to prove that I've killed Armfield. Now we have dismissed all this for the present, can you induce the local authorities to give me something to eat, for I'm starving?"

Allan laughed.

"I'll go and speak to the sergeant. I shall not come back, for I must deliver your letter and attend to some business of my own, but I'll see you this evening. It would be superfluous to tell you to keep up your spirits, you do so to a degree that drives your serious friends frantic!"

Allan went out. He walked very slowly towards the little cove where lay the *Sunlight*. He was full of anxious thought—tired, physically and mentally, because of the false

dreams, the broken hopes, the chill of disillusion. Here was his best friend in unmerited disgrace. This man, Armfield, had left his curse behind him. He tainted every mind he was brought in contact with while living; now, dead, he brought a false accusation against an innocent man. It was always a battle against evil, and there was not much apparent triumph for the good, yet Allan had no thought of giving in. More strict day by day in the fulfilment of his own duty, more rigorous in the enforcement of the duty of others, Allan's character slowly hardened. He laughed bitterly as he walked to the shore this morning. How far away from his early views and reasonings his life had carried him! How he had spared people in old times, spared them to the verge of injustice. He was not inclined to do so now. Nature never spared.

Some detail of last night's scene Clifford was keeping back from him, of that Allan was well assured. He was resolved to know that detail. He made an effort to hold himself back from a conclusion towards which his mind was rushing. He wished to wait for proofs.

Allan was not long in reaching the shore

Even in the shelter of the cove the *Sunlight* was tossing restlessly on the waters, which were still disturbed by the storm of the past night. It was near the time that Clifford had fixed to sail, and the men were on the look-out. A little boat was close to the ship with a sailor in her. Allan hailed him, and he pulled in to shore. It was Walter Haworth who rowed, and he looked questioningly in Moore's face when the latter asked to be taken to the *Sunlight*. He said no word, however, merely obeyed Allan.

As they came under the cutter's bows, Allan bent forward.

"Look here, Walter," he said, "I want to go back to shore in a few minutes, and I wish you to take me. Don't give the oars to any other of the crew."

Walter nodded. He was a man of few words.

All seemed ready for departure on board the *Sunlight*—every man at his post. Smashing Jack lolled against the mainmast with his pipe in his mouth. He showed as little recognition of Moore's presence as possible, though, when he took the note, a look of cunning watchful-

ness shot out from under his heavy eyebrows. He gave a coarse laugh when he had read it, and stood upright.

“Can you take a message straight, mate?” he asked roughly.

“If I choose,” Allan answered quietly.

“Tell the skipper,” said Jack, “that I’ll sail at the turn of the tide. By the Lord, I’ll go,” he added; “but I’ll take my mistress with me! It’s the captain’s privilege.”

“I’ll give your message,” said Moore abruptly. “Good morning.”

Smashing Jack walked to the ship’s side and signed to Haworth to pull in close.

“You can drop yourself over, I fancy,” he said, turning to Allan, and handing him a rope, of which one end was made fast on deck.

“I fancy so.”

As he answered, Moore swung himself over, and was in the boat in a minute. As they pushed off, Smashing Jack called out—

“Tell the skipper it’s all right; and if he had not been a damned fool and had not stayed on shore, instead of coming aboard after the diving match, he would be a good many leagues out to sea to-night.”

It was early yet, and all the freshness of morning was in the air. The wind had dropped to a slight land breeze, and the air was soft for winter. Allan began to think more calmly. He wanted to prolong these quiet moments, that his mind might feel clear.

“Pull round the cliff, Walter,” he said, “and land me below Wreck Cottage.”

Walter was running in straight to shore, but he changed the direction of the boat now.

“Were you on shore last night?” asked Allan.

“Yes, sir. I had a walk all round after nightfall, and passed the Sea Gull just as it was gone eight bells. I was a bit thirsty, and thought as the place was alight they would give me a drink; but they said no, as it was past hours, so I made for the *Sunlight* after that, and pretty hard work it was getting to her with wind and tide against me.”

“Have you heard what happened last night?”

“No,” replied Haworth indifferently.

He was pulling a long, easy stroke and looking out to sea.

“Squire Armfield fell over the cliff last

night and was drowned, and Clifford is arrested."

"Our skipper? What has he got to do with the squire being drowned?"

Haworth asked the question rapidly, and bent forward so suddenly that he jerked one oar out of the rowlock.

"Nothing at all. He tried to save him. As far as I can get hold of the story, Walter, the two men were rather drunk—I know Clifford was. They had had high words before they left the Sea Gull, and I fancy Armfield followed Clifford to continue the quarrel. They were on the cliff together. Armfield tripped and fell over. Clifford went down and tried to save him, but couldn't; and now one is dead and the other arrested!"

"Well, what's the rest? Master Clifford never touched him, he wouldn't soil his hands with the ruffian."

"I want to find out the truth. Will you help me, Haworth?"

"With a will, sir, if I can, for the skipper's a true man; but how can I?"

"Clifford is keeping back something. Were there any witnesses? Were the men alone?"



This is what I want to find out. If there was any one present, I'll never find it out from Clifford."

Haworth did not answer. His brows were contracted, and his face looked more than usually hollow and worn. He was rowing very slowly now.

"What did I hear Smashing Jack say about sailing at the turn of the tide?"

"Clifford thinks, I suppose, that he'll not be free for some time, and has given orders that the *Sunlight* is to sail without him."

"And what use can I be, if I sail to-day?"

"I want to hear what you think. You might help me to find a clue to the whole affair."

"There's a woman at the bottom of it, of course," said Haworth bitterly.

"And that woman?"

"There is only one woman that the skipper loves," Haworth went on, taking no notice of Allan's question. "But, Lord bless you, there are dozens who love him; and you don't know much about Guy Clifford if you think he wouldn't defend the miserablest drab from harm, just as much as a woman he loved and

honoured. Look here, master," he continued, "who wears a long cloak with a hood to it, a cloak like what the fish-wives wear over the water; but it wasn't a fish-wife, it was a lady? I knew it by her hands and her walk. Can you guess?"

Allan nodded.

"Well, I saw the company leave the Sea Gull last night. I waited, because I wanted a word with the skipper; but when I saw you come out with him, I would not go up to Mr. Clifford, so I leaned against the corner of the inn a bit longer. I don't know why, except to listen to the wind and defy the devil. Suddenly I saw a flutter, and a woman, in the cloak I tell you of, slipped round the house and ran off on the same path that you and the skipper had taken. She was soon out of sight, and I thought no more about it till now. What do you think, master? Has she anything to do with it?"

"Yes. You must not sail to-night, Walter."

"I can't desert."

"Not if Clifford wants you?"

"That's another thing. Then I leave openly."

“And you think Smashing Jack will agree to let you go?”

“Perhaps not,” Haworth answered quietly.

“Can I depend on you?”

“The skipper can.”

“Where shall I find you?”

Haworth smiled.

“In the right place when I am wanted. And now, sir, I’ll land you, for Smashing Jack has his plans, and we’ve been long enough on this trip ashore.”

They were close to the beach, and Haworth ran into the little creek close to Jos Thornton’s garden. No further word passed between the two men. Allan Moore stood on the shore, his eyes fixed on the ground, till the sound of the oars died away in the distance; then the silence seemed to rouse him, and he turned towards Wreck Cottage.

Perhaps he might find Nora Severne here. Her love for Jos Thornton seemed the only soft spot in her strange, wayward, unlovely nature. He did not mean to spare her; she should not ruin another life.

Allan’s whole face looked set and resolved. His nature recoiled even from sternness to a

woman, but life had been so embittered to him that his scorn of falsehood and wrong made cruelty possible to him. Whatever waves of compassion might visit his soul to-day, they could not turn him from his purpose, nor make him for an instant relent.

It was past noon now, and the sun was shining with broad, generous beauty over earth and sea. The door of Wreck Cottage stood open, and the flood of light which fell across a corner of the room made the rest of the space appear for a moment very dark. Allan stopped to try and distinguish objects in the darkness, then took a step gently forward, which enabled him to see into the inner room, the door of which was also open.

This was what Allan saw.

On the narrow stretcher, with hands folded on his breast, the quiet form of old Jos. The sharp brown eyes no longer looked out, for the eyelids were closed for ever over them ; but there lingered yet, on the expressive lips, the little defiant smile which was brave without bitterness. On a chair beside him were his son's clothes, the slip of paper with the record of the lad's death, his own hammock and his

sou'wester ; tenderly laid here and there over him a few winter blossoms from his garden ; and at the foot of the stretcher Nora, leaning against the wall. She was so standing that her eyes were resting on her old friend. Her hands were behind her head, her whole figure was full of grief, sad with a sadness which could not die ; yet the corners of her lips were slightly lifted as if in reflection of the smile on the dead man's face, except when her tears fell slowly, and then the lips quivered and drooped for a moment.

The very embodiment of womanly tenderness, of absolute loneliness in sorrow, Nora seemed to Allan, as he looked on this scene ; and for a few minutes he forgot his errand, he forgot the bitterness of the past years, and felt an impulse to put his arms round her and comfort her as best he could. The desire was shortlived.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE ACCUSING VOICE.

NORA did not notice, the morning after Thornton's death, that there was a mysterious expression on the maid's face when she came into her room. She was not inclined to notice much, for the burden of life lay heavy on her. She was now absolutely alone in life: the only being with whose mind she had any real sympathy was gone. There was no aim now which made the working hours precious to her, no loving glance watching for her coming, no life that needed her life now.

Blank weariness was never long in Nora's face. The battle was always well fought. Never a sentimental melancholy in her expression, as if she had been flattened by the storm; only at times a yearning desire in her eyes,

which deepened in moments of emotion into a seeming demand of life, for truth and justice.

For a few minutes that morning, with hands pressed tightly on her eyes, Nora shut out the light of day, as if in so doing she could shut out likewise the light of memory. Even while she made this shrinking movement, Nora was facing the future.

She would leave The Dell, and live where old Jos had died. She had grown more and more to hate Catherine's presence. She had tried the experiment of living with her; she need not prolong it. Resolutions, however unproductive of joy in the carrying out, are mentally bracing. The mind that cannot resolve is the most miserable, the most hopeless.

Nora went down to her library. She would write a line to Guy, and send it on board the *Sunlight*, then go to Wreck Cottage to say good-bye. She had scarcely sat down, pen in hand, when the door opened, and Catherine walked in. She looked excited. She walked up to the table where Nora was writing.

"How indifferent you seem!" she burst out. "Do you never feel *anything*? Are you never

roused, no matter what happens? It was a horrible death!"

Nora's eyes were full of surprise.

"I don't talk of anything which troubles me. I think I never did; and it would be absurd of me to grieve over Jos Thornton's death with you, as you never knew him or cared for him."

Catherine looked at her for a moment; then laughed.

"Is old Thornton dead? I was not talking of him. He was old, and you must have expected him to die. Do you not know what has happened?"

"No. What is it?"

"It is said that Mr. Armfield was thrown over, or fell over, the rocks last night; and Guy Clifford is arrested."

She said the last few words slowly, her eyes fixed on Nora's face.

"What has Guy got to do with it? I don't understand."

"Neither do I. What do you expect me to know about it? That's the report. I have not seen the squire or Guy for three or four days. *You* know more about the latter than I do."



She spoke rapidly, and broke off the blossoms of a plant which stood on the table. She was flushed.

Nora noticed all this. The thought came into her mind that Catherine had been drinking.

“Do you understand?” Catherine continued. “Mr. Armfield, the man I was engaged to, is killed; and Clifford is supposed to have had something to do with it.”

“Guy could have no connection with Squire Armfield’s death. I wish you would tell me more particulars.”

Catherine rang the bell with an impatient jerk.

“Jane will tell you all she has heard. It is not a subject I care to talk about.”

Then she turned to leave the room; but before she could open the door, the servant came in with a suddenness which suggested that she also had been in search of more particulars.

“Tell Miss Nora all you have heard,” said Catherine; “she seems not to know anything about it.”

Jane’s information was derived from the most reliable authority. The baker had seen

the squire's body carried up from the shore, and Mr. Clifford walking beside him. The baker had followed, and learnt that, in a drunken quarrel about some woman, Mr. Clifford had pitched the squire into the water, and afterwards had tried to save him. Finally, Mr. Clifford had given himself up, and, of course, he would be hanged.

Nora sat and listened, making no comment. Vaguely, and as if the sound were a long way off, she heard Catherine talking to Jane, and relating how she had been awakened by the storm in the night, and how she had risen and looked out of her window, and had noticed how dark it was.

Jane, of course, had been visited by many sensations of a weird and prophetic nature, and had been unable to sleep. She had heard Miss Nora coming in after midnight, and had wondered how she could have had the courage to stay out on such a night.

Nora heard their words, but paid no heed to them. She was trying to explain to herself the cause of last night's tragedy, and, being in an unhealthy state of mind, was inclined to connect it with herself. All trouble had

seemed to circle round her own life. Why should Guy quarrel with Mr. Armfield? She knew that she was the only woman whom Guy loved. Could he have tried to force from Armfield the truth about Evelyn Holt, so as to clear her, Nora, from the stain that saddened her life? It was quite possible, quite possible that again she should bring misery into human lives. And Allan? Oh, she could not hurt him a second time, that would be too cruel a fate. First, the woman he loved, and then the friend he loved, injured through her! Oh no; she could not submit to be entangled in such a cruel chain of events.

Nora sprang to her feet. She was wild at the mere thought of this.

She would go at once to Allan. She would tell him that it could not be because of her that this had happened; that she had nothing to do with it; that she was free; that she had never, at any time, been cruel.

Nora looked round, remembered that Catherine and the servant had been in the room a few minutes ago, and saw that she was now alone. She grew calmer. Perhaps the story was exaggerated. She would go and find out

for herself. Under any circumstances, she must control herself. She had much to do at Wreck Cottage, and it would quiet her to look at the old man's peaceful face. All his wishes must be carried out, his papers put in order, her loving little duties be done to the dead, before she thought of the living.

Walking to Wreck Cottage, Nora's wild mood seemed to pass away. In the calm morning air, which had forgotten its wrath of last night, she thought of the great arms of Time, which take all human creatures into their embrace, and lift them into eternity. She thought of the millions that come and go on the earth, and are not one whit happier or better understood than she, and yet who smile and are thankful, and lift their faces to the sun, rejoicing in the eternal beauty of Nature, which for ever renews, and will gladden other hearts which struggle for the truth when theirs are gone and forgotten.

Thinking thus, as she walked across the wood, and brushed through the withered bracken, Nora's soul stretched from the narrowness of her own life to the immensity of humanity, and grasped the consoling thought

of universal progress, which exalts all thoughtful minds at some moment of their lives.

At Wreck Cottage Nora put everything in order, handling tenderly all that the owner would never touch again, laying close by Jos everything that was connected with his son, to be buried with the old man, for such had been his wish.

It was after this sad task was ended, that Nora paused to spend her last half-hour with her old friend, to take her last look at him, and bid him quietly good-bye.

It was thus that Allan found her, standing at the foot of Jos Thornton's bed.

Allan's heart was softened, and one moment's recognition of what Nora really was came to his soul. Not longer than a moment did light visit him. He fell back into his false habit of thought respecting her.

A slight creak of the floor beneath Allan's foot made Nora look round. She saw him, brushed the tears from her eyes quickly, and came forward.

"You want to speak to me?" she asked.

They did not shake hands. It was weeks since their hands had met.

“Yes,” Allan answered; “I have much to say to you. Will you shut that door and sit down?”

He glanced towards the door into Jos Thornton’s room.

“Why should I? I like to look at him, and you are not a man to be scared at death.”

She sat down, for she was weary, and Allan stood opposite to her.

“You know about this terrible accident?” he said.

“I heard of it this morning.”

She looked down. Had he come to accuse her of his friend’s wasted love? Was it her fault? She did not feel as if she could repel any accusation. Very probably in some extraordinary way she had been the cause of this fresh trouble. She had a fatal nature, which blighted other lives unconsciously.

“Clifford is arrested. He is known to have had high words with Armfield at dinner. Clifford admits that Armfield followed him up the cliff that night”—Allan went on in a hard, mechanical voice, as if reading an indictment—“and that Armfield attempted to quarrel again. Clifford states that Armfield tripped on the

edge of the rock, and fell over; that he scrambled down, and tried to save him; that, failing to do so, he roused the police. They rowed round and round the cliff, and watched the coast till an eddy of the sea cast up Armfield's dead body on the sands. Clifford's statement will not be believed. Armfield was a man of position; Clifford is a man of no position. The trial will go against Clifford. I know, and you know, that he is innocent; but he *says* there were no witnesses. I think there was one. I feel sure of it, for my conviction has been corroborated by Walter Haworth this morning."

Nora had been looking down all this time, listening intently, and trying quietly to take in everything connected with this story. At Allan's last words she looked up suddenly, and a flash of light came in her eyes.

Allan continued—

"Haworth was standing at the Sea Gull when the party there broke up. He saw Clifford leave; some minutes later he saw a woman, who had evidently been concealed in an angle of the inn, follow Clifford."

He paused.

Nora thought at once of Jessie Lawless. She was a wild girl, capable of anything; but what could she have to do with the quarrel between the two men? Allan evidently imagined that it was in her power to discover the witness. Had he thought of Jessie? Nora was ignorant as to how much or how little he had heard of that story.

“You think some one was present, and you think I can discover who that was? But the witness, if there was one, might have some spite against Mr. Clifford, and be against him at the trial.”

“If the witness were not in his favour, Clifford would never conceal her presence. The woman Haworth saw wore a long cloth cloak, with a hood to it. She was not a villager; she was a lady.”

Nora was looking Allan full in the face. For a second, a strained expression came in her eyes, as if she were trying to understand — then, suddenly, a quiver passed over her whole body, from head to foot. Something in Allan's glance informed her. She read his thoughts. She was smitten with the horrible truth and was silent.



After a minute, seeing the fixed expression of Nora's face, Allan decided that she was hardening herself against admitting the truth, and he burst out bitterly—

“I have resolved to clear Guy, to find out the truth, no matter who is to suffer. I have no pity for any one who tries to shield herself in a cowardly way at the expense of another. My rule now is justice before mercy. I will not have the life of my friend ruined for any false sentiment. Guy Clifford is the only being that has never failed me, and all the women in the world are nothing to me in comparison with him.”

His voice rose and seemed cruel in its strength. Nora did not speak. She was realizing to the full that Allan Moore believed her to have been concerned in last night's tragedy, believed her to be now shielding her reputation at the cost of Guy Clifford's honour, and perhaps his life! She shivered slightly, and looked in the direction of the next room.

Allan changed his tone. He might win her to a confession by a little more gentleness. Perhaps, now, softened by the death of Jos Thornton, she might act well and unselfishly,

if he were judicious in the way he spoke to her.

“Nora,” he said more quietly, “it would be a noble thing to save an innocent man from disgrace and possibly from death by acknowledging the truth—would it not? The woman who was present would probably run no risk of life such as Clifford does now. Can you not influence her to speak?”

He looked at Nora pleadingly.

“If she spoke and freed Guy from his present position, would you think gently of her, as of a loved friend?”

“I could not but respect and admire her. I think I might grow to believe that she was what I thought her long ago, and that her acts between that time and this had been mistakes, not acts of coldness or cruelty.”

Nora’s eyes softened, a strange look of peace came in them.

“I will try to persuade her,” she said very softly; “but perhaps it will not be advisable that she should speak. It is right to atone for harm done, even though the harm was not intentionally caused. Pain borne for those we love is sweet.”

Nora looked now through the open door, and her eyes rested on the still form within the next room.

“Death smooths things,” she continued gently, “and the spiritual presence of some one you love makes things clear, for he does not judge as we do. And there’s another thing,” she added, with a slight smile, which gave a strange expression to her face, and still looking at Jos as she spoke. “I think, when the task is done the end will come.”

After a little pause she looked up at Allan.

“Yes ; I’ll find out all I can, I’ll use my influence if it can be used wisely. You may trust me this time.”

She stood up.

“Tell Guy that old Jos died quietly and bravely, and I’ll see to everything and do everything he would have wished. Now, Allan, I wish to be alone. You can have nothing more to say, and we are ill-suited to be companions.”

She moved towards the door. There was nothing discourteous in her dismissal of him. She was gravely dignified ; and her whole bearing and manner filled Allan with a sensa-

tion of being in the presence of a nature far above his own, a nature suddenly raised into an atmosphere which was unearthly. He had no words now ; he left the cottage silently. Nora stood at the door and watched him go, still with that slight smile on her lips.

She stood in the shadow of the little porch, looking out. The air was clear and cold. There was a sound of a carter's whip and the heavy tread of a waggon-horse on the road ; there was the lazy, lapping noise of the receding tide on the beach. The broad light of life was before Nora, behind her the darkened room of death.

She quite understood the meaning of Allan's visit now. Some woman had been present at that unlucky meeting between Guy and Squire Armfield, and Allan Moore was convinced that she was that woman. Who had it really been ? That must be found out. Could the real witness be made to speak ? Surely Guy himself knew.

All these thoughts followed one another rapidly. It was no mock heroism which had prompted Nora's words to Allan. Some

act of self-sacrifice, into which she could throw her whole force and life, which would crown her shattered story with poetic beauty—this she had often longed for. Isolation had given the tone to Nora's life. Other women, with the same nature—a nature which gives all without grudging—find in their own homes a happy outlet for their generous impulses. Nora's reserve and the lack of sympathy around her, had concentrated all her womanly tenderness into a fierce self-torture, into a desire, which was a passion, to vindicate her standard of life, and not let the shadow of one act rest on her for ever, obscuring what she knew to be the true tendency of her thought.

Had the moment come when she could do this? This mysterious woman, who was she? All probability pointed to Catherine. Nora's mind was full of swift intuitions. She knew that she herself was the only lady at Cairn Cove who ever wore the cloak which Allan had described. She remembered having seen it lying in the hall at The Dell. She dwelt on Catherine's excited manner that morning. She had long guessed that Catherine, in her fierce way, loved Clifford. Could she per-

suade Catherine to admit the truth and defend Guy?

Nora had no exaggerated wish to sacrifice herself needlessly ; her mind was not so warped from simplicity and directness.

She left Wreck Cottage and went home. When she reached The Dell and had entered the house, she heard Catherine singing a gipsy song, which was a favourite with her in her wild moods. Nora went to her at once. She walked up to the piano where Catherine was sitting.

“ Stop for a minute, Catherine,” she said imperatively. “ I want to speak to you.”

Something in Nora’s tone made Catherine cease singing. She was not wont to obey.

“ Did you wear my big blue cloak last night ? ” Nora asked slowly.

“ No. I never wear anything of yours. Do you want it ? I saw it in the hall just now.”

“ Yes, I know it is there now ; but did you wear it last night ? ”

“ I said I did not.”

“ You know why I ask ? A woman who wore a cloak like mine was on the cliff last night when Squire Armfield fell over.”

Catherine looked at Nora for a minute ; her eyes glittered, and her face wore a strange expression. Then she laughed — laughed loudly and for some seconds.

“ And you want to make out that I was that woman,” she said at last. “ Come, Nora, that is too clumsy. You wore your own cloak last night, for it was not in the hall after you went out, and Jane saw it there this morning. There is not such love between us that I should like to take the credit of your doings ! It does not concern me at all what you have done or may do ; but try to thrust me into any false position to save yourself, and you’ll find my testimony tell unpleasantly against you.”

Catherine turned to the piano and resumed her song, singing with daring strength and seeming to defy the world. She was sure that Clifford had not recognized her ; she was sure that Armfield could tell no tales ; and she was full of audacity and triumph. Her love had been despised by Clifford ; he was in prison. The woman he loved and she hated was suffering, and would suffer more.

Catherine sang on exultingly, and her song

was horrible to listen to. Nora heard her shudderingly, and remembered that the man this woman was to have married was scarce twelve hours dead.



## CHAPTER XIII.

### HAWORTH'S LAST SERVICE.

WALTER HAWORTH was glad that Mr. Moore had spoken to him, but he did not, for an instant, contemplate following his orders blindly.

Walter's religion was devotion to Clifford and hatred to Smashing Jack. What the devil made the former appoint the latter first mate on board the *Sunlight* was beyond Walter's ken.

Haworth would not sail that evening; but he would take no steps about appearing at the trial without finding out what the skipper wished.

Men like Mr. Moore, Walter thought, with all their head knowledge, were apt to make a mess of a thing like this. Besides, young Moore knew nothing of the smuggling trade,

or how that might come against Clifford at the trial.

Haworth did not go back at once to the *Sunlight* after landing Allan. He dawdled about the village for a few hours, and picked up all the intelligence he could. There was a general lament at the arrest of Clifford, though many remarked that they could not say but that Master Clifford might have pitched the squire over, for the skipper was mighty hot of temper. There was a coroner's inquest on Armfield, and the jury brought in a verdict of manslaughter against Clifford, after first finding, with their usual perspicacity, that Armfield came by his death through drowning. Bill Holden, one of the crew of the *Sunlight*, came on shore towards dusk and took Jessie Lawless back with him to the cutter.

These were some fragments of information which Haworth gleaned during his hours on shore. With respect to Jessie's visit to the *Sunlight*, Walter knew that Bill Holden must have exercised his ingenuity in lies to persuade her to this step, for Jessie dreaded Smashing Jack as she dreaded no one on earth or under it.

About an hour before the turn of the tide, Haworth rowed himself to the cutter. When he reached her, Smashing Jack was standing on the poop giving orders. He eyed Haworth in his usual suspicious way, but made no remark, except to tell him to haul up the boat and make her fast. When this was done, Walter walked up to Smashing Jack. Already the cutter was getting under way. The anchor was up and the men were bringing her head round. Haworth faced the new skipper.

“I’m not going to sail to-night, Jack,” he said coolly, with his hands in his pockets.

“Aren’t you?” was the answer, given with a sneer.

“No, I’m not.”

“It’s a pity you made the boat fast, for, by ——, I’m not going to lower her.”

Then he turned his head and gave orders to the men.

“All the same, I’m not going to sail with you,” Walter went on. “I’ll take my orders from you second-hand, but not direct; and I’ll never sail with any skipper but Clifford. I was not inclined to play the sneak, and hide on shore, so I am here to tell you I don’t sail

with you. Now," he added, "what have you done with Jessie Lawless? I fancy the girl would like to return to shore with me."

"Jessie is all right, and it's no business of yours; and I swear to God you'll not leave the ship. I'm master now, and if one of the crew rebels I'll lay him in irons, so you may go to hell!"

Haworth had watched Smashing Jack's hand close, so he had edged away a little to the ship's side. Smashing Jack saw the movement, and sprang at him like a tiger; then suddenly aimed one of his crushing blows full at his chest; but, by a quick change of posture, Haworth caught the blow on the point of his shoulder, and, instead of laying him insensible on the deck, it struck him overboard, the *Sunlight* having no bulwarks. Smashing Jack ground his teeth with disappointment, and swore a foul oath; then plunged his hand into his pocket, drew out a pistol, and fired in blind rage into the water. But Haworth was safe from his violence. He had dived at once, and came up at some distance from the vessel. He was at perfect ease in the water—could swim and dive as few men ever can. But this

accomplishment of his was unknown to the rest of the crew; for some unaccountable reason he had always asserted that he could not swim a stroke.

Walter struck out bravely, and soon was a hundred yards from the *Sunlight*. Then he turned, and looked at the cutter. The crew were getting her out to sea as fast as possible. He heard Smashing Jack shouting to the men to look sharp. They were spreading every rag she could carry, the wind was freshening, and she would be out of harbour in five minutes.

“I’ve lost every shilling I had in her,” thought Haworth, “so has Master Clifford, and Smashing Jack will be an alderman or a landed proprietor yet!”

With this reflection, Walter began to swim for shore, and in a quarter of an hour he was standing on the beach, wringing the water from his clothes as best he could.

It was dark now, and Walter knew he must see Clifford that night, or there would be but little chance of speaking to him, as he was to be removed in the morning to the county gaol, a distance of about thirty miles from Cairn Cove.

The defences of the police station were slight; besides this, Haworth's father had been a constable, and Walter remembered every turn of the place, and knew that a little stratagem was all that was required to gain ingress to the room in which Clifford was confined.

Walter began to run to warm himself, for he was chilled by the cold sea; but, when he stopped, his clothes clung to him like an icy sheet, and he shivered and coughed.

"I wonder," he thought, as he walked more slowly through the straggling village, "how long I'll hold out?" He took a glass of cider at the Sea Gull, and listened to the comments of the men at the bar. They hated Armfield. He was known to oppose the improvement in the Stannary laws, to be hard on his tenants, to be partial as a magistrate; but he was the squire, and the people were enslaved by custom so far as to think his death more lamentable than that of any one else at Cairn Cove, and the author of it more vicious than another murderer. For by this time, now about twenty-four hours since the occurrence, the world of Cairn Cove had become thoroughly

convinced of Clifford's guilt. The villagers were indignant at first, for Guy was a favourite, and they treated the accusation with scorn ; but by-and-by public opinion changed, as it generally does with outward seeming, and these men were talking to-night of Clifford's probable sentence, quite coolly, with now and then an ejaculation of pity.

Haworth leaned against the wall and listened to them. His eyes seemed to burn in his head, and there was a bright spot on his cheek, though he shivered.

One man said he'd take his oath that Guy Clifford would swing for it ; another disagreed, and fixed on penal servitude for life as his probable sentence ; while some even planned the sequel to his death—they supposed the *Sunlight* would be sold, and they wondered who would get the skipper's share of the brass.

A contemptuous laugh broke in on their friendly talk.

“ You are a set of cowardly fools ! ” Haworth burst out. (They had not noticed him where he stood.) “ You've not the pluck to have an opinion of your own. Yesterday Guy Clifford was the best in the world ; to-day, without a

rag of evidence, he is a murderer, and you'll think yourselves well rid of him if he is condemned. You sail with the wind, and it does not matter whom you pitch overboard, so long as you are safe yourselves. You are a poor-spirited crew; and, let me tell you, Guy Clifford did not lay a finger on the squire, who was too foul a blackguard to be drowned in clean water!"

With these words, Haworth looked at them all for a second, his dark eyes gleaming in his white, haggard face; then tossed off another glass of cider, and strode out of the inn. Haworth walked through the village, and out on the road to Trevyn. After half an hour he turned back, so that by the time he reached the police station it was late, and everything quiet. Walter was active as a cat, so, keeping well in shadow, he was up by the gutter pipe and on the roof in a few minutes. Often he had done this in his boyish days, climbed up, and peered down through the window in the room—which fastened on the outside—undiscovered by his father and un- seen by the prisoners. To-night he unfastened the window gently, attached a rope he carried

in h  
and  
roo  
ing



in his pocket to the iron hook of the skylight, and this so gently that he dropped into the room without rousing Clifford, who was sleeping soundly.

Haworth laid his hand on Guy's shoulder, and shook him.

"What way's the wind?" asked Clifford, springing to his feet.

Then he looked round and laughed.

"By George! I thought I was on board the *Sunlight*. How the devil did *you* come here?"

Guy looked at him from head to foot, as if he were a ghost.

"I came from aloft," he said, pointing to the open window and dangling rope.

"What have you come at all for? Why the deuce are you not at your post? You have not deserted—have you?"

"I've come for orders; I don't take them from Smashing Jack. Deserted! no. I told your cursed first mate that I would not sail with him. He tried to settle me with one of his long strokes, but he only grazed my shoulder and sent me overboard, and I've come to you, which I must do in any case."

## HAWORTH'S LAST SERVICE.

Explain yourself, Haworth. There is some son for this, I suppose."

"I saw Mr. Moore this morning," he answered, sitting down on the edge of the table. We talked a bit, and he told me I should be

wanted as a witness to clear you at the trial, and so I stopped ashore."

"You a witness!" Guy said in astonishment. "In the name of fortune, what do you mean?"

Then Haworth carelessly related what he had seen the night before, watching the skipper very closely all the time. He saw Clifford's brow cloud, and his lips grow hard and resolute. He did not speak for a minute or two after Haworth had finished. At last he looked up suddenly.

"Walter," he said, "listen to me. If by speaking you could clear me, and if by your silence I were to run the risk of being condemned, and yet I told you that I'd give my life for you to be silent, which would you do?"

"I'd obey your orders, captain; that's what I've come for."

The two men shook hands.

After a minute, Clifford said—

"I'll write a letter, which you'll deliver for me to Miss Nora Severne, as soon as possible, into her own hands, when she is alone ; after that, you'll disappear. Do you understand ?"

"Quite."

Then Haworth walked up and down the room while Clifford wrote his letter, but his steps were as noiseless as a cat's.

When Guy handed him the letter, he said—

"Now it's all right, and I'm easy in my mind."

He turned it over, looked at it once or twice, and put it in his pocket. He was thinking that perhaps this letter sealed the fate of this man whom he was devoted to. Nevertheless, he took it, and meant to deliver it.

"Perhaps you'd like to know," he said, as he stood up and played with the end of the rope, which hung down from the roof, "that Smashing Jack has taken Jessie with him to sea."

"Poor devil ! what made her go ?"

"Tricked into it, of course."

"Well, I think Jessie can take care of herself. She'll cure him of his fancy for her."

"Will she ? Perhaps so ; but you'll never

see the bonny craft, Smashing Jack, or the crew again, as I'm a living man! And now, sir, before I go, will you do me a favour? Will you tell me why you chose the devil for your mate?"

Clifford laughed.

"He is a plucky fellow, afraid of nothing, and can command the men. I may have done Smashing Jack an injury once, without knowing it, and I thought I'd try and make it up to him."

Haworth made no remark, but went up the rope hand over hand. When he was at the top, he said "Good night," drew up the rope, and shut the window. He looked at Clifford yearningly for a minute, then began to slip down the roof. It was characteristic of the two men that neither of them suggested or thought of Clifford making his escape, which would have been perfectly easy.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### WHO DARES GREATLY, DOES GREATLY.

THERE was not much rest for Nora the night following Clifford's committal; her brain was full of feverish thought. The strange events that had occurred seemed to have opened a chapter in her life, the end of which she could not guess at. At moments the scheme that wrought in her brain gave her a wild delight; at other moments it seemed impossible to carry out, and the plan changed from its aspect of self-sacrifice and atonement to that of exaggerated sentimentality. But always vividly before Nora was the pain of Allan's face, and the fierce resolve in it which would rescue his friend at any cost. His friend, thought Nora, the only being that he loved. She had brought misery enough to Allan, had

WHO DARES GREATLY, DOES GREATLY.

abittered his youth, and given to his lips those stern lines which twenty more years ought not to have graven on them. Of this new trouble she was perfectly guiltless; therefore, in bearing it herself, she could the more completely atone for the first evil she had wrought.

Nora scarcely told herself what she was going to do; but her heart thrilled within her, and she held back from the thought of any definite act, as we hold back from complete trust in any coming joy, lest the joy and life be too hard to bear.

Sleep was impossible to Nora. She got up and drew back her curtains, and looked out of the window. Always there was calm and counsel in Nature. It was a grey night, no moon, no stars; but a lingering light in the sky as of sleeping day. Nora looked out, and while her eyes seemed to travel further and further, her thoughts grew clearer.

There was always the eternal beauty of the earth, which the pitiful stories of men could not mar; the perfect life reached, which human creatures strove for in vain. The wind-tossed trees, the starry sky, the fragile flowers,

resisting rocks, the sounding sea—all fulfilling wisely and well their allotted part. And if man could not in such simplicity live, but was greater in failure, so must he be greater in achievement. Whom had she to satisfy? No one; only the demands of her own soul. The opportunity of raising her life out of the shadow of apparent selfishness into the golden light of heroism had come. Should she not gladly seize what fortune offered? How? A little more detail as to the occurrences of that night must be gained before she could act; but who would give her these details? Certainly not Guy; certainly not Catherine. Was there an unsuspected place for repentance in the heart of the latter; and would she, perhaps, come forward and acknowledge all, rather than let the innocent suffer to save her reputation?

Nora smiled as she thought of it, remembering Catherine's song that morning, remembering her face and manner all day—the defiant curl of her lip, the expression of secure triumph in her whole form. And if Catherine would not speak? Leaning her arms on the window ledge and looking out, the night grew darker

to Nora, in answer, and the clouds loomed heavily above her.

The taint of crime would rest on Guy, whatever the result of the trial. She knew, too, full well, that if the trial once began, and inquiries were instituted, all the contraband trade Clifford had carried on would be brought to light, and would help to build up a mass of damning evidence; for, in the minds of our fellow-men, to be found out in one act which is publicly reprehended is to be judged guilty of every scoundrelism. The blighting of Guy's life must follow, even if he were not found guilty of Armfield's death; and all this would seem to Allan to be her deed. No denial of complicity would be believed by Allan; Nora read this in his fixed expression of bitter wrath. He looked on her as the instrument of all evil. He could have crushed out her life with a glance, if by so doing he could have saved his friend; as it was, he had crushed her soul, had warped her mind from all simple, happy thought.

The day began to dawn, faint streaks of came in the east. How sweet is delight the new day! Nora watched its b



Beautiful was the freshness of its young face, even in the winter's cold. As the morning breeze blew away the dark clouds of night and left the sky in its robe of azure, so it brought, as it bent the bare boughs and swished the long, loose branches of the ivy against the window panes, thoughts to Nora's soul which were strong and goodly; not hope, perhaps, but resolution; not the love of youth, which dreams of roses and caresses, but the throb of self-forgetfulness for another's joy; not the faith which is propped by high-sounding phrases and promise of reward, but the enthusiasm which gives all for the accomplishment of a noble thought.

Poor child! Would the day ever dawn which should set her self-sacrificing life in the light of truth, and show the brave, tender heart in her frail body?

As Nora was leaving the Dell this morning to go down to Wreck Cottage, Catherine stood at the hall door. She was dressed in black.

"Mr. Armfield is to be buried to-morrow," she said, as Nora was passing out.

As she spoke, she put up her hand and

shaded her eyes, for the sun was full on her head.

“Is he? I did not know.”

Nora lingered as she answered. This woman was a strange study. Her cruel effrontery fascinated Nora somehow. She felt a desire to penetrate into her mind.

“Do you mean to attend his funeral?” Catherine asked.

Still she shaded her eyes with her hand.

“No.”

“Reverence to the déad is seemly, my sister.”

The sunlight was on Catherine’s lips as she spoke, and they smiled mockingly.

“I never revered him while living, I can’t pretend to do so now.”

“Yet you had better go; your absence might be remarked.”

Nora looked at her in wonder.

“Do you pretend to say, Catherine, that you think I know anything of Squire Armfield’s death?”

Nora went up to her, took her hand down from her eyes, and held her wrist in a tight grasp. There was only a gleam of rage in

Catherine's eyes. Then, after a moment's silence, she laughed.

"How well you act! I'll tell you the truth, since you wish it. I am perfectly convinced you were present that night. What happened, I cannot say; but I should advise you not to attend the squire's funeral in that cloak of yours!"

Then she laughed again. Nora still held her arm tightly.

"And no matter what may happen, Catherine, no matter what evidence may come out at the trial, you will still hold to your conviction? Nothing which may occur will induce you to admit that this which you hint is a lie?"

Catherine looked at her in a puzzled way for some minutes; then said suddenly—

"Oh, I see what you mean; you are afraid I shall betray you. If you are not a fool, you cannot be suspected. Clifford will never speak. He is weak about women, and you have been so uncommonly generous in your offers to him that I fancy he would not hurt you."

She paused a moment, and looked at Nora.

This was a delicious instant. She saw Nora's face change from utter astonishment to shrinking pain. Then she continued—

“If you get into any scrape, you'll have yourself to blame. I am not going to say anything, unless you try to defend yourself at any one else's expense ; and as to my changing my mind because of evidence, what a fool I'd be ! I know what I know. The whole thing was probably only an accident ; but if there were any one concerned in it, I know who that person is.”

She said the last words very slowly, and looked unflinchingly in Nora's eyes. The latter felt as if she were going mad.

Had she been in a dream ? Had she really been on the cliff that night ?

She began mentally to try and disprove that which she knew needed no disproof.

Allan and Catherine were convinced. Why should she not be convinced herself ? Perhaps Clifford was also convinced of her presence that night ; and, if so, why should she resist ?

Nora had passed into a supernatural atmosphere, in which she could not control her

acts. It seemed as though she moved and spoke unconsciously. She leaned against the door, and did not notice that Catherine had gone.

What was the next thing that would happen? She felt as though she wanted to clutch at something to steady herself; everything material and spiritual was in confusion. She wanted some one to speak angrily and rouse her, or to speak tenderly and make her weep; something to happen that might break the enchantment which was being wrought in her. Some magic was at work; everything seemed to change around her, and she herself more than all else.

Suddenly, up the glen, came the sound of the old church bell. It was ringing very slowly, tolling out the tidings over the sea and over the mountain that some one had gone for ever from the little hamlet. Nora knew it rang for Jos Thornton. She counted the slow strokes of the iron tongue that told his years, the last chronicle that Time would ever mark for him. Where was he? Out of her reach, beyond her care and love. Had she done all she could for him, her one faithful friend? No. Guy stood in his place, for old Jos had

loved him as his child. There was something to be done for Guy.

After this, Nora became sane in thought, and the spell was broken. She walked down to Wreck Cottage with resolution in her step, a strong, determined woman, almost cheerful, and watching eagerly for any word which might help her in the practical carrying out of her scheme. The word came.

Sitting on the railing which enclosed Jos Thornton's garden was Walter Haworth. Nora walked quickly up to him. She knew he was waiting for her.

"You want me?" she asked eagerly, when she was near him.

"Yes," he answered, raising his sou'wester.

He gave her Clifford's note as he spoke.

"Will you come into the cottage?" she said, leading the way, and holding the note unopened in her hand.

Haworth followed her. She stood by the little window, looked out for a moment on the sea, then she read these words of Clifford's—

"Nora, do not be anxious; I shall, no doubt, be released immediately. I beg of you not to come forward at all in this business. It was

simply an unlucky accident. When you rushed between Armfield and me, it was only with the wish to prevent us from attacking one another; the squire tripped and fell because he was maddened by drink and rage. I put it all clearly before you that you may not wrongly accuse yourself. It would be no good your speaking, and would bring all sorts of slanderous suspicions on you, and make me wretched. I'll try not to believe what you said that night, and even if it be true, which God forbid! I could not bear any word said against you. To the end I'll swear you are a good woman, and to the end I'll love you."

Nora read the words several times, each time raising her eyes at the close, and looking out on the calm of the sea. At last she came out of the recess of the window and stood opposite to Haworth. She put a chair near the table.

"Will you sit down a minute?" she said.

He obeyed her, and Nora seated herself also. Her voice, her manner, her movements, all were peculiarly gentle. There was a sort of light in her face, and a sweet gravity which was not sadness.

“Shall you see Mr. Clifford?” she asked.

“No; he is to be moved this day to the county gaol.”

“I am told the *Sunlight* sailed last night. Why did you not go?”

“Mr. Moore thought I might be wanted at the trial.”

“Why so—what do you know about it?”

She spoke quickly and eagerly. Haworth smiled.

“No offence, but that’s my business and the skipper’s.”

“Then you will appear at the trial?”

“No. I obey orders. Master Clifford does not want me.”

“I believe you love Guy Clifford?”

Haworth gave a jerky nod of his head.

“Yet you go away when your evidence might be of service.”

“I obey orders,” he answered doggedly. Suddenly he added, “What’s the good of questioning me? Look ye here, miss, there’s one woman’s evidence can make the whole affair as clear as day.”

“You mean mine?”

He nodded again.



“If I do not interfere, how do you think the trial will end?”

He tossed up his head scornfully.

“The Lord knows! How can I tell the twists in the law or the twists in the lawyers? The trade of the *Sunlight* will come out, and of course a smuggler is a damned scoundrel! He won't pay the Government its little fee on the brandy and 'baccy he buys and carries himself; so, of course, he'd cut a man's throat as soon as look at him! Guy Clifford will stand a bad chance with the squire's mates, I fancy.” The man looked fierce and miserable. “I tell you what it is,” he continued. “Suppose he gets out all right after the trial, and they can't prove anything against him, how do you think he'll look after it? He's as free as an eagle, is Guy Clifford; he fears no man, and is as wild as the sea. How do you think he'll bear the taint of prison walls and the cursed lies of a pack of idiots, eh? It will break his spirit; he'll never be the same lad—never.”

His head sank on his breast.

“Don't be afraid, Walter,” Nora said gently. “I'll speak when the time comes, and there

shall never be a word against Guy Clifford. Now tell me what you know about it."

Haworth raised his head and looked at her.

"I'm blessed if I can believe you. What, you'll not be a sneak? You'll have the pluck to face the world and speak the truth? By God, you're the best woman I ever knew!"

As he spoke he rose from his chair in reverence and admiration.

"Sit down; tell me what you know."

"I saw you come round a corner of the Sea Gull that night, and follow the skipper and Mr. Moore up the road towards the cliffs. I saw you hang back a bit at the cross roads till the two men parted, and then go quickly after Mr. Clifford. You wore that long kind of cloak with the hood over your head."

"And why will you not state this?"

"Because the master bid me not appear, and I obey orders; besides, you know well he loves you more than his heart's blood, and if I said a word against you he'd curse me. I can bear a good deal, but I'm too near the end to bear that."

“How all love him!” Nora muttered; “why cannot I?”

“Maybe you will by-and-by,” Haworth said, replying to the question she had asked of herself. “They say the best women love what gives them a sight of trouble—their babies, for instance. Maybe when you take Master Clifford’s part and stand up against the world for him, you’ll find out he is worth doing it for. And so he is!” Walter burst forth, rising from his seat and beginning to walk to and fro excitedly. “He’s a brave, true gentleman, and as fine a sailor as ever trod a deck! Look how good he is! Good to a devil like Smashing Jack, for whom drowning is too easy a death; good to a poor wretch like myself, whom he picked out of the gutter and made a man of; good to women—— Lord, if you knew how good he’s been to them! Why, he wouldn’t harm the meanest drab that ever tried to destroy a fellow’s soul; he’d find out some good in the worst of them, and he would let them take advantage of him with his eyes open—they are never shut, mind you—rather than seem a bit cruel. Is he a man to be locked up in gaols, and fought over by a lot of rascally

attorneys, who want to prove themselves saints? I must see him free before I die—by God, I must!"

The veins on his temples swelled, and a cold sweat came on his forehead. He passed his handkerchief across his lips.

"Before you die," repeated Nora, coming near to him and laying her hand on his arm. "Are you ill?"

He did not answer.

"I need not ask," she continued, "I see your face. You shall see Guy Clifford free, if that's any good to you."

"You will tell the skipper," Haworth said, in a voice which had suddenly grown weak and low, "that I'd have stayed to give evidence only he told me to go, and I always obey orders. You don't want me; you'll see him right?"

"Yes; but where are you going? Who are you going to?"

A curious smile stole over his haggard face, but he did not answer.

"Have you no mother? Is there no father for you? Is every one desolate

“Desolate! no. There’s no occasion for me to growl. I’ve had a rare bit of fair weather off and on, and I’ll be into harbour before long. Good-bye, miss; I’m going now.”

He took her hand quite simply. It never occurred to either of them that there was a line of birth or position, which they must not cross. Haworth stood still for a moment, then said suddenly—

“I’m right glad to have had a talk with you. I seem to understand, when you lift your wonderful eyes, why the skipper thinks there is no woman like you.”

Then he went out.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE WORLD AGAINST HER HEART.

THERE may be some people now living who can remember hearing their parents talk of the strange trial of Nora Severne. There were few who ever heard the tale who could forget it, none who were present on whom the scene did not make a deep impression. There was startled surprise in all faces at Guy Clifford's trial, when Nora Severne came forward as witness for the defence. Clifford's solicitors, his counsel, and Allan Moore were the only men who expected her to appear.

With strange clearness, Nora stated that on her rested the guilt of having unintentionally caused Squire Armfield's death. She related the scene on the cliff as it occurred, and stated that Armfield's fall was due to her hasty interposition between him and Clifford. She told

the story simply and calmly, in a way which convinced all the listeners that she spoke the truth. She paid a tribute to Clifford's chivalrous desire to shield her, and said it was impossible for her to allow him to suffer for an accident of which she was the cause. She added that there was much circumstantial evidence to prove that her statement was true, though Guy Clifford himself was the only eye-witness who could corroborate the story.

Every face was turned towards Nora while she spoke; and almost every heart was full of pity for her as they watched the solemn earnestness of her expression, the strange eagerness of her eyes.

Never once did Nora look towards Clifford. While speaking, her eyes were on the judge; when she sat down her gaze rested on Allan.

In support of Nora's self-accusation, Clifford's letter to her was read aloud; Allan came forward and related the conversation between himself and Walter Haworth, and afterwards told of his interview with Nora at Wreck Cottage; then the servant at the Dell was called, and gave a rambling account of having heard Nora Severne come home at night, of

having missed her cloak from the hall on the evening of the accident, and of having seen it there again early next morning; finally, Catherine gave her evidence, repeating her conversation with Nora at the hall door of the Dell. In conclusion, the judge apologized to Clifford for his having been unjustly arrested, adding, in the usual hackneyed words, that he would leave the court without a blemish on his character.

Nora Severne surrendered to take her trial for the manslaughter of Trevor Armfield.

Not once throughout this scene did Nora look at Clifford. She seemed to gain all her courage from watching Allan, and when Guy was set free, her face reflected the glow of satisfaction which showed in Allan's every feature.

The trial ended, every one departed, and Nora carried in her heart a peace which she had never known. This peace of conscience, this calm of mind, was with her throughout the following week, at the end of which time her own trial was over, and she too was released.

There was not sufficient evidence to prove Nora guilty of having caused Armfield's death,



so she was set free ; but far and wide through the village where she had spent her simple girlhood, among those whom she had worked for and ministered unto, a belief grew that Nora Severne was morally responsible for the squire's death.

What brought her on the cliff at all that night ? Why did Armfield quarrel about her ? What was the reason that she rushed between the two men ? Was there some ghastly story which she wished to be silenced in the grave ?

These questions were whispered in the air, and were repeated with continuous persistency. Nora noticed their effect, when she returned to Wreck Cottage, in the averted glances or insolent stare of the villagers as she passed.

The one gleam of brightness that Nora looked to was a gentle word from Allan now that she had saved his friend ; but the days passed and the word came not.

The first day of a new year the vicar deemed a suitable time to touch the heart of a criminal and call upon a sinner to repent. He also thought that an interview with this extraordinary person, Nora Severne, might be interesting, and that he might draw from her

state of conscience many practical lessons for his parishioners; furthermore, he thought he ought to know, as the vicar of Cairn Cove, whether Nora meant to continue her residence here, also whether old Jos Thornton had left her much money, and many other little items of information, which might possibly be extracted in the course of a ministerial visit.

Nora was exceedingly astonished when the vicar presented himself at Wreck Cottage. She overcame her inclination to dismiss him, and gently asked him to sit down. After all, he was Allan's father, and even through him she might hear some tidings of the man she so faithfully and hopelessly loved.

Quite consistently with his past style of eloquence, the vicar appealed to Nora's feelings, asking her to look on him as a friend, it being his duty, as a clergyman, never to turn his back on the sinful or sorrowful. After this preamble, he said he had come to wish her "a happy new year," and to exhort her to begin a new life, and spend the days that might be left to her more worthily than those which she had wasted in the past.

Nora listened to him with a tired smile on

her lips. What was the use of being angry ? She let him run on uninterruptedly, till at last he paused to see the effect of his eloquence. Then she looked at him fixedly, and answered—

“Don’t say any more, please. I am sure that, by degrees, you’ve grown to think that all this which you have said is inspired and excellent, and ought to do every one good. I don’t want to laugh at it, but as I shall probably never see you again after to-day, you must forgive me if I preach to you now. It’s my turn—isn’t it ?”

Before the vicar could recover from his astonishment, Nora went on—

“I have never intentionally hurt any one, yet I have done harm unknowingly, and shall feel the weight of it always. You have deliberately hurt Allan, have driven him to live with men who, if they can’t vitiate him, will always sadden his life, and this because he is too honest to become a clergyman ! Why be so anxious to show your displeasure at his disobedience ? It is far more important to show your love. He is not likely always to be a miner. Perhaps some day he’ll make his way in the world—for Allan has brains—and then

you may not be able to win back the love of your son, which you have cast away now."

Always, always Allan ; this was Nora's sole thought. Even now she could not lose this chance of speaking for him.

She paused for a moment, and the vicar drew himself up indignantly.

"I did not come to speak to you about my son."

"No," Nora said hastily, "you came to speak of me ; but there is nothing to be said on that subject. There might be a clergyman in the world who could do me good ; you cannot. It is not your fault nor mine. I thank you for any kind intention you had in coming to see me, but I do not wish to see any one."

She stood up as she spoke, and the vicar involuntarily rose also.

"I do not feel that I am heartless," she said gently ; "and every kind word or look I've ever received I'll remember gratefully."

The tears gathered in her eyes, poor child, even in the vicar's unsympathetic presence. Quickly she forced them back, and smiled as she added, "Perhaps the parish would like to

know what I am going to do ; news is always acceptable. When I have put everything in order I am going away. I shall lock up Wreck Cottage, and no one shall enter it till I come back, or till I am dead. That is all I have to say, except good-bye."

She held out her hand, but the vicar did not appear to see it. He murmured something about being grieved at her sinful hardness of heart, and departed.

Nora lingered on at Wreck Cottage a little while, hoping for a letter, a word from Allan, and hoping in vain. Not even Clifford did she see. She felt crushed, alone in the world. She never asked herself why they came not, these two men who had been so associated with her life.

Soberly, as if preparing for death, Nora set all her affairs in order. Her books were removed from the Dell to Wreck Cottage, and all else that she prized from loving memories or daily use. Then, in the dusk of a January day, she travelled to the nearest town and put all business matters, of which she knew but little, into the hands of a solicitor. She made her will ; she transferred her share in The Dell,

by deed of gift, to Catherine ; and having done all this, one day, when the wild wind was sweeping over moor and mountain, and covering the earth in a shroud of snow, Nora disappeared from Cairn Cove.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE TRUTH IS KNOWN.

THREE years passed away, and the doors of Wreck Cottage remained closed. The creepers had clambered all over the roof, but no one looked in or out through the rose-hung lattice. The garden was kept neat, as it had been in Jos Thornton's time, but the flowers that grew there were only gathered to lay upon his grave.

It was rumoured that one autumn evening Nora Severne had been seen on the beach, seated on the great rock, where in old days she had often sat and mused. She had been seen, the folks said, dressed in her long hooded cloak ; her strange blue eyes were looking out seawards over the waters she had loved. No one knew whence she came or whither she went. The villagers began to lower their

voices when they spoke of her, as though she were a ghost; and by-and-by, as time passed and she did not return, they said it was her spirit, which could not rest, which had come back to haunt the place where she had murdered Trevor Armfield.

The truth was that Nora Severne was living in a foreign town, and in stern reality was tending the sick and suffering with unwearying kindness and skill. Here, as Sister Marguerite, she was known and loved, and many an eye watched for her earnest, tender face, many an ear listened for her footsteps anxiously.

Nora went about her chosen work cheerily; she was not a woman to moan vainly under any grief. The day's work, however uncongenial, was done with all the power of mind and body, and her loving imagination kept her life from ever sinking into a degrading or mechanical existence.

Nora cherished always in her heart the hope that one day she should go back to Wreck Cottage, that her true story should be known, and that she should look Allan and Clifford in the face without a cloud upon the past. But this must come to pass through no



word of hers ; if the events of life or the acts of others did not bring this change, then the truth must be hidden for ever.

Once in the peaceful autumn Nora's heart was filled with home-sickness, and she came to Cairn Cove. She looked on all her old haunts, on the cliffs, the beach, the rolling waves, and on Jos Thornton's grave. She heard, from strangers, tidings of those who had been a part of her past life. Clifford had married Catherine Severne, and they lived at The Dell. Allan, by swift change of fortune, had become member for his county. He was the chosen representative of the people, and far and near his praises were sounded ; but it was said that his unforgiving father was now unforgiven, and that though he now fawned on Allan in his prosperity, the love once cast off had never returned.

All these things Nora learnt on that autumn day ; bitterly also she learnt that here, in the hamlet where she had lived so long, her place knew her no more, and she fled back to her work with a heavy heart.

When the three years drew to a close, Sister Marguerite received a letter, and her face

flushed and her hands trembled as she read it. It reached her through her solicitor, who had faithfully kept the secret of her dwelling-place.

The letter was from Guy Clifford, and it told Nora many things. It was the history of the past three years.

Catherine was dead, and when the fear of death was on her she had spoken the truth. By her confession she hoped to propitiate the Unseen Powers, whom, in her last hours, she shrank from with superstitious cowardice. She proved Evelyn Holt's unfaithfulness to Allan Moore by letters from Evelyn to Armfield, and thus she freed Nora from the stain of having falsely accused Allan's betrothed. Catherine laid bare all her own cruel intrigues, and explained fully how she had deceived Clifford on the night of Armfield's death, and how, after Nora had given herself up to save Clifford, she had convinced both Guy and Allan that she, Catherine, had forced Nora to do this by threatening to expose her guilt if she did not voluntarily come forward and confess her part in that night's tragedy. In explanation of her hatred to Nora, Catherine stated that there was no tie of blood between

them, for her mother had left a letter telling her the secret of her birth, and admitting that she, Catherine, was not the child of Edgar Severne.

After the simple relation of all this, Clifford added that he had meant to see Nora before she left Wreck Cottage, three years ago, but at that time Walter Haworth was dying, and he had been with him day and night. When Walter was laid in his grave, Nora had gone.

Clifford asked Nora, in memory of old days, to believe that he had never married Catherine from love, but from motives which, if mistaken, were not quite unworthy. He ended his letter by entreating Nora to let him, and Allan also, see her once more.

“At last!” Nora murmured, when she had read the letter throughout.

Then she sat very still, looking out of the window, on the bleak winter’s day in this French town.

Ten minutes passed thus ; then she turned her eyes towards the long row of white beds in the room where she sat, and she smiled.

After all, she had grown to love this place ; it was home to her now. Yes, she would go to

Wreck Cottage, and see Allan and Guy. She would give the cottage up to the latter, and come back here to her work. She would write to Clifford to-night. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday—she could be there on Thursday. She would ask them both to come and talk to her on Thursday evening, and she would leave again on Friday. Catherine's confession would do justice at last, but, oh, it could not undo the work of years on the lives and characters of Allan, Clifford, and herself. The offered good was not the priceless boon it might once have been ; but why should she complain ? Millions and millions of beings were on this earth, millions and millions had been laid beneath it, and the sum of their mistakes, their sorrow and bitter disappointment, who could count it ? Her trouble—was it not like the wail of an infant on a battle-field, amid the clash of arms and the death agony of thousands ?

CHAPTER XVII.

THE END CROWNS ALL.

NORA stood in Wreck Cottage once more and listened to the winter wind.

Whence did it come, and whither did it go ?

Heaven was weary of the blindness and deafness of men, of eyes that were never lifted, of feet that were always stumbling ; what did it matter about them ? There were mocking voices in the blast that went shrieking by. What were men's houses and garments, and the vesture of fruitless laws, which they bound on their neighbours because they loathed the cumbrance themselves ? The wind mocked them in its freedom. Ha, ha ! it laughed as it passed. I go where I like unchecked ; I wake the flowers with the gentlest touch ; I rock the birds in their nests, and carry them over to

other climes to a joyful, fetterless life ; I tear down men's works relentlessly, all, all that have not foundations deep in earth ; I laugh as I sweep along through cycles of years, for I see men's faith in the unchangeableness of laws that their puny souls have made, and I know they shall perish, the winds of time shall sweep them away, and with ever new and new laws they will fetter themselves again. All things had a voice for Nora to-night, the wind and the roaring sea, and these thoughts rushed through her brain.

It was just three years ago since she had left this place with a shadow of disgrace upon her, and now she was waiting to stand, blameless, in the presence of those who had misjudged her.

She heard footsteps ; she lighted candles, for it was almost dark, and opened the door. Guy Clifford and Allan Moore came in.

They all three stood by the chimney, Allan facing Nora, Guy close beside her. As Nora looked up at Allan, a deep flush spread over her face and then died out, leaving it very white. Her hands were clasped tightly, her ips pressed together, and the resolution which

had never been lacking through her life showed itself in her whole expression and attitude.

“Guy has told me,” Allan began, in a tone of eagerness, “how cruelly we have all misjudged you, Nora. I am afraid we can do but little to make up for the years of sorrow and solitude; but you will let us try? This that you wrote is not true? You will stay amongst us.”

He bent a little forward as he ended, and the habitual calm of his voice was almost gone. Nora fixed her eyes on him. How they burned and flashed!

“It is true. I am going to-morrow, and I am never coming back again. There are some things I want to say before I go, and I am glad you have come. I want you both to know the meaning of my life. I will not take my secret with me; it belongs to you and Cairn Cove, and to the dead years.”

Nora was silent for a little while, and the fire-light danced gleefully over the little room. The two men were silent also, while a dread of something unknown grew in their minds, and the wind sobbed and cried at the lattice.

“Did you know that I loved you, Allan? No; I kept that faithfully here.”

She laid her hand on her heart. Clifford drew a little nearer to her; but Allan did not move, only lifted his head with a sudden gleam of surprise in his eyes. Nora went on—

“I loved you from that first evening I was on board the *Sunlight*, that evening when you and Guy carried me home. I could not see Evelyn Holt deceive you; I could not let you be the dupe of a woman so poor, so false; therefore I spoke. Well, you know how she died; but you don't know how I saw the dislike of me in your face, and how it maddened me till I thought I had been base, had betrayed a woman from jealousy, and wrecked two lives. I always read your thoughts of me in your face, and this is what I read there and accepted. But I don't submit to things much; there is always something to be done as long as life lasts. I was near madness once, but not near death. I sought a place for repentance, and it came at last. You know the story of the cloak, and how easy it was to take the guilt of Squire Armfield's death on myself. I did it to save your friend.”



Nora still looked at Allan.

“I knew he was the only being in the world you loved, so I saved him. For three years I’ve borne my lonely life. I did not do this for Guy’s sake”—she turned slightly towards Guy for the first time—“though he deserved that I should, for, in spite of everything, he has never quite lost faith in me. Well, Catherine has told the truth, and my atonement is wrought out at last. It is all over, and I am going. This is what I wanted to say. You see, I was truthful about Evelyn. It was not a girl’s jealousy that blinded me and made me work my rival’s ruin, thank God!”

“You will not go, Nora?”

Allan came to her and took her hand. Guy stepped back into the shadow of the room, and they both forgot his presence. Allan’s voice had taken its old tone, its old boyish warmth of sound.

“You will give me a chance of understanding you at last. Perhaps I can blot out some of the bitterness and misery. Good God! why did you throw away your love, your whole life on me?”

“Hour by hour, and day by day, I grew to love you, Allan. I shared your ambitions ; I wanted you to lead no common life filled with mere personal interests, but to fight bravely and triumph. You have done so. You have friends amongst the greatest in England ; you have work to do which fills the whole future for you. What link has your life with mine ? And yet——” she added. She paused, and loosed his hand ; there was a smile on her lips. “And yet I am greater than you ; for the years have chilled and embittered you, taken the heart out of your work, left you only the victory of power ; while I—I keep the same passionate heart-beat, the same thrill of enthusiasm, which makes my life a torture and a glory. Oh, Allan,” she continued, “how I loved you ! Was it possible, when we kissed in the days gone by, that no knowledge came to you from the touch of my lips, that you carelessly took the caress, without thought, the caress which had some of my very life in it.”

Her voice was not raised, but vibrated with sorrow and passion.

“You could not see how sometimes I

lingered beside you to say a word ; you could not know how my heart craved with a hungry longing that you would take me in your arms and murmur one word of love."

She paused, and there was deep silence. Allan bent over Nora and looked in her face steadfastly, noting all the weariness and pain written on it. How the shadow of age had fallen prematurely on her young head ; how the lines of sad thought had come round her tender lips ; how the intensity of unuttered pain had crept into the depths of her eyes ! And this had been all for him !

His manhood, his chivalry, and, what was perhaps stronger, his youth answered to her cry. True, he did not feel, as with Evelyn, that she might take his life and crush it out if she pleased ; he did not feel that fervour of worship which had made Evelyn's smile a delight, her kiss a rapture. This heart-beat which he felt for Nora was fainter far ; but if she had had the power to rouse it, she would have the power to strengthen it. Why should he deny himself the joy that might come ? He had a right to the delight of a woman's love as well as other men. Why ask himself if

he could return the full measure of love that had been given to him ?

“Nora”—as he spoke his hand clung to hers, he bent his head till it almost touched her cheek—“Nora, it is not too late ; my arms are open to you now. Come to them, darling ; we will forget the bitter past.”

There was a glow of passion in his voice. He was seeing Nora as he had never seen her before—with her armour off, defenceless, womanly. His eyes had been opened, and he saw suddenly all the beauties of her body and soul, perhaps more of the former than the latter. Her eyes were tremulously soft, her lips quivered with emotion and looked ineffably tender, her slight form seemed rounded and beautified by the atmosphere of her love.

Clifford, standing in the shadow, forgotten, clenched his hands, and, for the first time in his life, felt a wild anger towards his friend. What right had he to offer such a woman the pretence of love, the poor remnants of a better feeling ? He knew Allan, he knew human nature too ; he gauged the passing passion which gave to Allan’s words a semblance of

power. How dare he offer to Nora anything but the purest, the noblest devotion ?

Clifford took a step forward, but Nora's words arrested him. She did not speak bitterly, but her old scornful smile was on her lips.

“ I know too well, Allan, what true love is, to be misled by your words. Do you think”—her tone gained energy—“ that if I looked for such an answer as this I could ever have spoken ? I have pride enough of a certain sort. I did not tell you of my love to win a pitiful return, a flicker of passion ! I have thought of it all. I told you for truth's sake. I told you because after to-morrow there will be no longer any Nora Severne here, and it is just as though I were going to die. I am not ashamed to have told you. Perhaps,” she added, with a smile which was quite gentle, “ I looked for a more tender friendship ; you have pained me by offering instead, a semblance of love.”

She was right, Allan thought ; she was too strange a woman to be loved. He felt a recoil from his momentary warmth.

A man of the world, not abashed when he

had offered himself for the county he had lived in, opposing men of higher birth and education ; not abashed when he had to fight the cause of the miners in parliament—Allan stood silent before this slender woman.

Yes, it was true, he thought, with an old weary feeling at his heart. He had not kept love fresh within him ; he had allowed disappointment to deaden it, and scorn of evil-doing to sink into bitterness and unbelief ; and now he even lacked the power to feel to the full the nobility of Nora's life. Her voluntary atonement, her glowing self-sacrifice, merely made her, in his mind, a woman too strange to be loved.

“Forgive me,” he said quietly. “I would not pain you for the world.”

“You did not mean to hurt me, Allan ; I know you spoke in all kindness. You see,” she said, in a calm, sad tone, “I was made like that, seemingly cold and reserved, always self-reliant ; and all the while I had quite a ravenous desire for love. When nature turns out such a contradiction, life goes wrong—does it not ?”

The two men stood and listened to her.

They had no wish to interrupt or break the utterance of her thoughts. It seemed that the long silence of her life could never find words enough to explain and tell its history.

“I have had my moments of recklessness,” she continued, “when nothing seemed in me but a desire to escape; but such an escape was never really what I wanted, because it meant leaving the lie to be believed, leaving nothing but the harm of my life to record me. I wanted recognition from those I loved, of the best that was in me, so I waited. The knowledge has grown gradually, that recognition of their true souls is impossible for some men and women. I am one of the number. This evening has completed that conviction, but I have left some light in your minds at last, enough to soften the rest of my days. I talk as though I were old, so I am. Do you think sixty years of peaceful life can weigh against the pain and struggle of my twenty-three? When I go away, I go into a little world I’ve made for myself, not altogether an unhappy one; and I want to thank you both and speak kindly words now that there is some understanding between us.”

Nora looked from one to the other and smiled. Clifford came forward and stood close beside her; he took her hand and held it. Allan stood with his eyes fixed on the ground.

“ You shall not hear of me any more after to-night. I leave you both as I first knew you—faithful friends.”

Her eyes rested on Allan’s downcast face.

“ You can’t help it, Allan, I know you can’t. If it were in your power you would give me all the love of your heart, but that can’t be forced in any fine nature. You are both very dear to me, but I cannot stay here in the old place. This is good-bye for ever. Will you go now ?”

She lifted Allan’s hand and touched it with her lips; then turned to Guy and kissed him tenderly. Neither of the men spoke. Clifford, as he kissed her, gave a little stifled sob, and tried to hold her in his arms; but she freed herself quickly, and opened the door.

A wild gust of wind swept in. The sky was dark with dense clouds. Allan and Guy passed out, and there was a smile on her lips, but none on theirs, as they went.

Nora stood for a few minutes and watched



them out of sight, then shivered, drew back, closed the door, and came to the fire, which was burning low.

Just now Allan had been here, and now he had gone, and this was the end.

Nora stood motionless and looked into the embers, and her thoughts, with inexhaustible energy, went over and over the past and plunged on into the future.

So she had done for ever with youth, and hope, and love. Well, it was best that all should go at a blow, and that she should not linger out her feelings and prop herself from day to day with a false hope. She had been no coward. The harm she had done had been atoned for. She had dealt boldly with life after all, and, as far as possible, had not submitted. Submission is apathy, apathy is death. What kind of lives do people lead? Lives all made up for them, which they swallow like drugs, and think that they are for their good—bah! What kind of guidance had her life had? She did not know. An untamed instinct of right, of a right which was often in defiance of men's laws and rules; an instinct which kept her very clear-sighted about things,

so clear-sighted that her thoughts to other men seemed visions, which she did not care to tone down to a point of comprehensibility.

Nora thought of all this now, and seemed to tell it over to herself, for long isolation had given her this habit.

Not in the least did she rail at life or fate. She had understood a little, she might understand more. How strange it was to feel all possibility of personal hope or joy at an end for ever! This day closed the story of her youth. Every step she had ever taken in life had been irrevocable. She had never provided for contingencies—left a way of escape, a loophole for wavering. Well, she thought, with a little gleam of pleasure, she had drawn immeasurable delight from the beauty of the earth. She thought of the gorgeous sunsets over the sea, when the glory of heaven descended on the earth, when the waves hushed their ragings, and the wind its sobs, and into her heart had crept, even at its saddest moments, a peace which no human word could have brought. She thought of that wonderful stretch of wild moor, which was so full of poetry to her; of the sounds of

animal life, the multitude of living creatures all fulfilling a scheme too vast for poor human souls to grasp. She thought how, to her imagination, the air was full of visions and melodies ; how she had listened on such a night as this and heard the stories of spirits ; and how the rocks, the sea waves, the clouds, had told their stories and she could understand. Was she much to be pitied, after all ? There had been voices in her life which had never been cruel, faces which had always been full of sweetness. To hide in a corner and let trouble crush thought and kindness, crush the spirit within you ; no. People like that lived in paralysis, in contemptible slumber ; and where did they go ? There was no place fit for them ; there was no place surely, here or hereafter, for shivering selfishness. Perhaps—yes, she had one hope—perhaps if she never flinched and never rested, the way might be shorter ; rest might come as a reward. No, there were no rewards in life or beyond it ; if there were, she had done nothing to win them. According to some quite unknown measure was the calm or the storm dealt out, as unknown as the law which one day brings the wild wind to harass the ocean

into a desert of wrecking foam, another day brings the soft breeze to whisper of hopes that are never realized, to caress the face of youth, and mock with dreams of human love.

She must see all the old places before she went away ; go round by the old home, by Allan's studio, by the village, then out on the moor, and back by Shenstone.

She put a shawl over her head, just as she used to do as a child. She opened the door. How long she had stood by the fire she knew not, but the ground was white. The wind was recklessly dashing its burden of snow hither and thither. The devouring ocean swallowed it as fast as it fell, did not receive it gently like the thankful earth.

Nora stood for a minute, then went out.

It seemed to her that the snow was gently shrouding all her past. She would walk round by all her old haunts, and, as she walked, the snow would softly blot out her steps, and when the morning came, she would go.

The snow was falling fast in large soft masses. Sometimes a sudden gust caught it and tossed it round as in wild sport and contempt for so soft and light a thing ; sometimes

the wind dropped, and silently the white, kindly flakes went on with their labour of shrouding the dark earth.

- Nora went by the shore and stood looking out on the sea. Was the human heart always like its unresting waves, always, on the calmest days of sunshine, keeping in its lowest murmur a thrill of sadness?

She turned away from its wailing towards the earth. She felt weary of the sea to-night. She had stood there motionless, till she looked like some white spectre on the lonely beach. She turned inland now to bid good-bye to the old places of her youth. On through the village she passed, and paused at the house where were the little waifs she had saved. A light burned in the window. She stooped and looked through the chink of the wooden shutter. A woman sat by the cot of one of the children and was singing softly, while in and out her needle flew through the little garment she was making. Nora passed on by the gates of The Dell. She did not linger there. The place was changed. The old wild hedge which separated it from the road was gone, the hedge which, in spring-time, had been

such a tangle of untamed beauty, roses, honeysuckle, briony, all wandering unchecked in the sunshine, while a little stream trickled at the foot and nutured the thirsty forget-me-not; all this had gone, and an unsightly iron railing had taken its place.

Round by Allan's studio; it was getting hard to walk, for the snow still fell, and the road was growing soft and deep. Nora leaned her arms on the low wooden railing, now almost falling to pieces, and looked up at the lonely outhouse.

Suddenly she felt stifled. Why had she come here at all? It was not calming, it was not softening to look on past days. All the thoughts of years gone by seemed to clothe themselves in visible forms. That young girl standing by the window and looking out, all happy possibilities were in her smiling eyes: but she flitted away, and another, a graver maiden, took her place; there was a little cloud on her brow, but much love and hope in her earnest eyes. Then she, too, was gone in a minute, and a pale, tearless woman stood there, looked round sadly, then came to Nora and was herself.

Why had she come here? Her lips burned and her hands trembled; the air was heavy, she could not breathe. She would go on to the wild moor, where the wind blew strong, and she could feel the old strength in her limbs. So she went.

It was a wild, bleak night on the moor. Such a stretch of white lay before her! Here and there a few stunted trees waving their bare arms, and there, beyond the expanse of white in shadowy distance, the troubled sky, which seemed to encircle the moor with immeasurable darkness.

She would go round the moor and back by the cliffs. She knew the relief of great physical fatigue when the brain is overwrought, so she walked on. She had to cling to her shawl and battle with the wind, for it rose mightier and mightier in its strength.

She laughed.

Was it not ludicrous, that a slender mortal, almost at the mercy of the elements, should feel it her right and in her power to control life and fate and human hearts, and to make for herself a beautiful story out of all these things? Such a poor unit to have such un-

limited desires, and to feel so sad and reckless, because everything was too strong for her single will to conquer.

She could laugh at herself now.

She must have a taste for tragedy, a morbid relish for melancholy, or she could never, on this desolate night, have left her fireside to wander about and put a dagger into old wounds. There must be something altogether wrong in a nature which does not adapt itself to its surroundings, but continues endlessly an outcast from the thoughts and lives of others.

Nora shivered, but she was not cold. She was getting tired, and she had not yet got half-way across the moor.

This would be the last indulgence of her misery, the last cry of her pain; with the morrow must come a new life.

She was growing weary. The wind was very grand and strong, but she was tired of its roaring, she wanted a little quiet. It was a dark night, but Nora knew the path so well, that, even obliterated as it was by the snow, she kept pretty closely to it, and she knew now that she was on the falling ground going down to Tredgar's lane.

Her eyelids felt heavy, she had no idea what



hour it was ; but it seemed two or three days ago since she had bid Allan good-bye. It could not have been to-night. How sad he had looked ! She had not hurt him—had she ? No, he might be pained for a little, for he had a tender heart, but only for a little. When the pain is not all our own pain, imagination stops short very soon. He did not realize what she had suffered, what she was suffering. Well, it was best so. If we felt the pain of others to the full as we feel our own, the work of the world would stand still, and the air would be filled with howlings !

She laughed a little. She was walking more slowly, she was very tired. The snow seemed to deepen, it was nearly up to her knees.

She must have got off the path. She must think a moment. She was facing east, then the path would be a little more to the left. She was very tired, but she roused herself and took a few steps to the left. The snow was now nearly up to her shoulder. She must have got down by a false step into the hollow, which was on the right of the path.

Well, it did not matter. She had better stay quiet for a little ; it was sheltered here, and she could wait. She was glad to wait, for

she was weary. She drew her shawl tightly round her, and laid her head down. She was not cold, only a little sleepy, but she could not sleep quite ; something seemed to rouse her every now and then, and she felt a thrill as from a nightmare.

She thought of her little stolen sleeps on the bough of the apple tree in the summer days of her childhood, and the start when she heard Miss Dixon's voice.

She looked up at the heavens. They seemed to be growing light. Was it the sun ? Yes, she was on the bough of the apple tree, leaning back against the trunk with her hands under her head, and she was warm and happy.

Now, she was falling from the bough ; but she looked down and saw her father standing underneath, with his silvery hair and sweet smile, his arms outstretched to receive her, and when she reached them, all the toil would be over, all her failures told, and she should find rest and peace at last.

THE END.



